

**EARLY CHRISTIAN POETRY
A COLLECTION OF ESSAYS**

SUPPLEMENTS TO
VIGILIAE CHRISTIANAE

Formerly Philosophia Patrum

TEXTS AND STUDIES OF EARLY CHRISTIAN LIFE
AND LANGUAGE

EDITORS

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EARLY CHRISTIAN POETRY

A COLLECTION OF ESSAYS

EDITED BY

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INTRODUCTION

In March 1991 the Dutch Foundation for Early Christian Studies celebrated its thirtieth anniversary with a conference on early Christian poetry in Nijmegen, its birthplace. Since early Christian poetry is a vast and varied domain, the organizing committee decided to highlight some important themes and tendencies and to illustrate these by focusing mainly on a few poets of undoubted stature.

Studying the poetical achievement of early Christianity necessarily implies taking account of its divergent evaluations of pagan poetry with its rich traditions. According to some, its mythological contents and its aesthetic cult of literary beauty ruled it out as an example, especially since the biblical tradition provided models of its own in the Psalms and the New Testament hymns. Reflections of this kind might almost have precluded the development of any kind of classicizing Christian poetry. The rare examples and reports from the early period illustrate the potentials of such a cultural isolation; but the power of the classical tradition, firmly established as it was in the educational system, could not be ignored and sooner or later its accomplishments, experience and technique were incorporated in the endeavours of writing Christian poetry of a quality which could also please the educated among the faithful and do the Church credit in the world at large.

The first part of the present collection of papers contains three contributions illustrating the early period, in which the Jewish legacy is clearly manifested. In the first paper Van der Horst deals with a small corpus of Jewish epitaphs in metrical form. Next, Luttkhuizen provides a detailed analysis of the poetical structure of Revelation 4 and 5. Finally, Bartelink describes how Christian authors came to accept and even use the *Oracula Sibyllina*, a curious and heterogeneous collection of mainly Jewish poems.

In the Latin-speaking regions of the Roman Empire poetry in the classical style was initially regarded with considerable suspicion; this is where part two of this book begins. Evenepoel deals extensively with such scruples and explains how in the course of

the fourth century a more receptive attitude gradually developed, which encouraged the rise of Christian poetry. Juvenius's epic rewording of the Gospels belongs to the earliest phase. Hilhorst studies his methods by analyzing a specific passage and comparing this with the wholly different treatment of the same biblical material by the fifth-century Greek poet Nonnus. The Bible, naturally, was an indispensable source for Christian poetry of all kinds. Mans studies its exemplary function in Ambrose's hymns, which can perhaps be regarded as the first clear specimens of Christian lyric poetry. Den Boeft attempts a definition of the character of this poetry, emphasizing the lyric poet's perception of the world. The most accomplished and versatile Christian poet in the Latin world was Prudentius, whose large and cohesive *œuvre* comprises various poetic genres. Understandably, the production of scholarship on this poet has attained considerable proportions. Bastiaensen's survey singles out some important trends in Prudentian studies. A century after Juvenius Sedulius composed his *Paschale Carmen*, which displays considerable progress in scope and technique. Van der Laan draws attention to the poet's expert use of *imitatio* in his creation of a biblical epic.

The third part is devoted to the eastern half of the Roman Empire, where Greek was the dominating language, though not to such a degree as to oust other languages. In fact, Ephrem, the greatest poet of the East, wrote exclusively in Syriac. Palmer introduces Syriac poetry in general and Ephrem in particular through poetic translations of five outstanding compositions, including the famous *Hymn of the Soul* from the *Acts of Thomas*, and analyzes Ephrem's art in detail. Gregory of Nazianzus comes readily to mind as the most literary-minded of the fourth-century Christian intellectuals. Demoen shows how this fundamentally positive attitude is at times expressed in more hesitant terms, as if Gregory could not quite make up his mind about the compatibility of Christian faith and classical poetry. Bremmer offers further elucidation of some historical details in the well-known, though by no means well understood *Visio Dorothei*. Synesius of Cyrene's highly philosophical outlook comes especially to the fore in his hymns. Barkhuizen explains some motifs in the eighth hymn, an *epinikion* in honour of Christ, which clearly demonstrates that the author should be regarded first and foremost as an heir of Hellenism.

Virgil's influence on Christian poetry of all levels can hardly be overestimated. Homer cannot claim to have had the same over-

powering position in the Christian East; yet his presence is perceptible everywhere, not only in the poetry of renowned literary figures, but also in less talented compositions. Van Deun surveys the achievement of Eudocia, the consort of Theodosius II, characterizing her poetry as typical of early Byzantine learned writing. In contrast to Ephrem, Romanos, a native of Emesa, chose the Greek language for his poetry. This did not mean that he broke faith with Syrian tradition in general or with Ephrem's example in particular. Van Rompay shows how his *kontakia* continued both the genres and the themes of these traditions. The book ends, as it began, with Jewish poetry: liturgical poems of the sixth and seventh centuries in which the Christian faith and its adherents are taken as a subject for polemical allusions, as Van Bekkum shows.

Christian poetry in a classical mould seemed at first a contradiction in terms. In a remarkable passage of his *Divinae Institutiones* Lactantius warns against the dangers involved in the *uoluptas aurium*. Music may pass because of its ephemeral influence, but the attractive language of fine poetry penetrates the mind, endangering its focus on God's salutary instruction. At the end of this austere passage, however, Lactantius suddenly makes a concession: if pleasure is derived from singing and poetry, Christians could and should take delight in giving poetical shape to the praise of God. In their different ways Christian poets implicitly or explicitly found the justification of their art in such reflections.

ABBREVIATIONS

ANRW	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</i>
BAGB	<i>Bulletin de l'Association Guillaume Budé</i>
BS	M. Schwabe—B. Lifshitz, <i>Beth She'arim II: The Greek Inscriptions</i> (Jerusalem 1974)
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina
CIJ	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaicarum</i>
CPJ	<i>Corpus Papyrorum Iudaicarum</i>
CRINT	Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum
CSCO	Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
GCS	Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller
GV	W. Peek, <i>Griechische Versinschriften</i> (Berlin 1956)
HJP	E. Schürer—G. Vermes—F. Millar—M. Goodman, <i>The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ</i> (Edinburgh 1973-87)
ICS	<i>Illinois Classical Studies</i>
IEJ	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
JbAC	<i>Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum</i>
LSJ	H.G. Liddell—R. Scott—H.S. Jones, <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> (Oxford 1968)
MGH AA	Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Auctores Antiquissimi
MH	<i>Museum Helveticum</i>
NtLA	W. Schneemelcher, <i>Neutestamentliche Apokryphen in deutscher Übersetzung</i> (Tübingen 1987 ⁵ -9 ⁵)
PG	Patrologia Graeca
PL	Patrologia Latina
RAC	<i>Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum</i>
RBPh	<i>Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire / Belgisch tijdschrift voor filologie en geschiedenis</i>
RE	A. Pauly—G. Wissowa, <i>Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft</i>
REAug	<i>Revue des études augustinienes</i>
RecAug	<i>Recherches augustinienes</i>
REL	<i>Revue des études latines</i>

<i>RFIC</i>	<i>Rivista di filologia e di istruzione classica</i>
<i>RHE</i>	<i>Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique</i>
<i>SC</i>	Sources Chrétiennes
<i>SP</i>	<i>Studia Patristica</i>
<i>TAPhA</i>	<i>Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association</i>
<i>TLL</i>	<i>Thesaurus Linguae Latinae</i>
<i>TU</i>	Texte und Untersuchungen
<i>VC</i>	<i>Vigiliae Christianae</i>
<i>WS</i>	<i>Wiener Studien</i>
<i>ZPE</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik</i>

JEWISH METRICAL EPITAPHS

by

P.W. VAN DER HORST

Some 1600 ancient Jewish epitaphs have been preserved, no less than 70 % of them in Greek, only some 18% in Hebrew or Aramaic, and about 12 % in Latin. Only 1 % of them is in metrical form: one from Rome (the only one in Latin, *CIJ* 476),¹ one from Larissa in Thessaly (*CIJ* 701), two from Beth She'arim in Palestine (*BS* II 127 and 183),² and twelve from Leontopolis in Egypt (*CIJ* 1451, 1489, 1490, 1508-1513, 1522, 1530 and 1530A).³ All of them date from the period of four centuries between the second half of the second century BCE and the second half of the third century CE. If we leave out of account the Larissa inscription, which contains only one metrical line (χαίροις ἀνθρώπων πεπνυμένε ὅστις ὑπάρχει),⁴ we are left with the striking fact that twelve out of fifteen of our poetical epitaphs are from Egypt, or rather from one place in Egypt, Leontopolis on the eastern side of the Delta, the city where a rival Jewish temple was established in the second century BCE by the high-priest Onias after a conflict in Jerusalem over the highpriesthood (the place is still called Tell el-Yehudieh).⁵ This is a striking observation, but completely in agreement with the fact that in other aspects as well the Jewish epitaphs from Leontopolis

¹ When referring to a number without further indication the reference is to J.B. Frey's *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaicarum* [= *CIJ*], 2 vols. (Rome 1936-1952); reprint of vol. I with a Prolegomenon by B. Lifshitz (New York 1975). For necessary *addenda et corrigenda* to Frey's volumes see my *Ancient Jewish Epitaphs. An introductory survey of a millennium of Jewish funerary epigraphy (300 BCE—700 CE)* (Kampen 1991) ch. 1. [The edition of W. Horbury—D. Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions of Graeco-Roman Egypt* (Cambridge 1992), came too late to be used in this paper.]

² *BS* II refers to M. Schwabe—B. Lifshitz, *Beth She'arim II: The Greek Inscriptions* (Jerusalem 1974).

³ The inscriptions from Egypt were republished in an improved edition by D.M. Lewis in V. Tcherikover—A. Fuks, *Corpus Papyrorum Iudaicarum* [= *CPJ*], 3 vols. (Cambridge, Massachusetts 1957-1964) III 138-66.

⁴ Note the Homeric flavour created by πεπνυμένε.

⁵ See R. Hayward, "The Jewish Temple of Leontopolis", *Journal of Jewish Studies* 33 (1982) 429-43.

are much more heavily influenced by Hellenistic conventions than those elsewhere.⁶

We need not repeat here that metrical epitaphs were a very common genre in Greek and Roman antiquity from the sixth century BCE till the sixth century CE. The very large collections in both W. Peek's *Griechische Versinschriften* (henceforth GV)⁷ and P.A. Hansen's *Carmina epigraphica Graeca* (CEG),⁸ and also the seventh book of the *Anthologia Palatina* amply testify to that. Thousands of pagan and Christian examples are known to us, and compared to that, the modest number of sixteen Jewish instances of metrical funerary epigraphy are a very small harvest. Nonetheless, they are a good illustration of the influence of Greek literary language, motifs and forms on Jewish culture.⁹ As we shall see, not only do these inscriptions often use Homeric language and metre, but they serve themselves of several motifs from Greek mythology as well. It is also literary sources that make abundantly clear that in educated Jewish circles Greek poetry in many of its forms and genres was known, adopted and adapted, and put into the service of Jewish ideas. We have, for instance, the (iambic) drama on the exodus, *Exagôgê*, by Ezekiel; the hexametric epic poem about the history of Shechem by Theodotus (almost certainly a Samaritan Hellenist); the poem about Jerusalem in utterly obscure hexametric Greek by a certain Philo; the many metrical so-called 'forged quotations' from Hesiod, Sophocles, Euripides, Menander, etc. voicing Jewish doctrines; the dactylic didactic wisdom poem by Pseudo-Phocylides; the lofty hexameters of the Jewish parts of the *Sibylline Oracles*, etc.¹⁰ And we should bear in mind that a great part of this literature has not been preserved at all.¹¹ All these writings date from the second century BCE to the second century CE, i.e., approximately the same period as our epitaphs.

Let us pass some of these tomb-inscriptions in review and pay attention to a few interesting details. We begin with no. 1530 (=

⁶ See my *Ancient Jewish Epitaphs* (n. 1), esp. ch. 3.

⁷ Berlin 1956.

⁸ Berlin, 2 vols., 1983-1989 (more volumes are to follow).

⁹ See my *Ancient Jewish Epitaphs* (n. 1), *passim*.

¹⁰ See my *The Sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides* (Leiden 1978); *Joods-hellenistische poëzie* (Kampen 1987); "The Interpretation of the Bible by the Minor Hellenistic Jewish Authors", *Mikra. Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* ed. M.J. Mulder (CRINT II 1; Assen—Philadelphia 1988) 519-46. V. Nikiprowetzky, *La troisième Sibylle* (Paris—The Hague 1970). *HJP* III 557-67, 618-54, 656-71, 688-93.

¹¹ See, e.g., the case of the 'Jewish Homer', Sosates: S.J.D. Cohen, "Sosates, the Jewish Homer", *Harvard Theological Review* 74 (1981) 391-6.

GV 1861) from Leontopolis, a unique epitaph in that it is the only Jewish instance of the well-known Greek genre of the dialogue between the deceased and the passer-by (Peek has 58 instances, GV1831-88).¹² It is written in distichs, alternating dactylic hexameters and pentameters (as is usual in epigrams), and it dates from the beginning of the first century CE.

Στάλα μανύτειρα.—τίς ἐν κυναναυγεί τύμβῳ
 κείσαι; καὶ πάτραν καὶ γενέτην ἔνεπε.—
 Ἀρσινόα, οὐρα δ' Ἀλινός καὶ Θεοδοσίῳ·
 φαιμισθὰ δ' Ὀνίου γὰ τροφὸς ἀμετέρα.—
 ποσσαέτης δ' ὤλισθας ὑπὸ σκοτόεν κλίμα Λάθας;—
 ἱκοσέτης γοερὸν χῶρον ἔβην νεκύων.—
 ζευγίσσης δὲ γάμους;—ζεύχθην.—κατελίνπανες αὐτῷ
 τέκνον;—ἄτεκνος ἔβαν εἰς Αἶδαο δόμους.—
 ἦ σοὶ κούφα χθών ἅ φθιμένοιο φυλάκτωρ.—
 καὶ σοί, ξεῖνε, φέροι καρπὸν ἀπὸ σταχύων.

The speaking tombstone: "Who are you who lie in the dark tomb? Tell me your country and birth."—"Arsinoe, daughter of Aline and Theodosius. The famous land of Onias reared me."—"How old were you when you slipped down the dark slope of Lethe?"—"At twenty I went to the sad place of the dead."—"Were you married?"—"I was."—"Did you leave him a child?"—"Childless I went to the house of Hades."—"May earth, the guardian of the dead, be light on you."—"And for you, stranger, may she bear fruitful crops."

As a matter of fact it is only the expression "the famous land of Onias" and the fact that the stone was found in Tell el-Yehudieh that make it virtually certain that we are concerned with a Jewish epitaph. The content of the poem otherwise seems completely pagan. We have here not only Hades, which had by the Hellenistic period become so much of a flourish or a metaphor that the Septuagint translators used it freely to render the Hebrew *she'ol*, but we also meet Lethe, the personified Oblivion, who gave her name to one of the rivers in the netherworld. Also the names of the dead person and her parents are far from typically Jewish. Μανύτειρα (feminine of μηνυτήρ) in the first line reminds one of the frequent use of μηνύω in metrical epitaphs.¹³ Its Dorian form

¹² The best edition and most extensive discussion of this epitaph is by E. Bernand, *Inscriptions métriques de l'Égypte gréco-romaine* (Paris 1969) 199-203. See also A. Momigliano, "Un documento della spiritualità dei Giudei Leontopolitani", *Aegyptus* 12 (1932) 171-2. D.C. Kurtz and J. Boardman, *Greek Burial Customs* (London 1971) 266, quote the following nice pagan example: "Chariton, how are things below?—All dark.—And what about the way up?—A lie.—And Pluto?—A myth.—Then we are done for."

¹³ See, e.g., GV1622, 1624, 1630, 1632.

highlights right from the start the artificiality of the language, which is also reflected in hapax legomena like φαμισθά, most probably the feminine of the non-attested adjective φημιστός, 'famous'.¹⁴ On the other hand, the typically Koine ending -ας in the second-aorist ὤλισθας betrays the author's incomplete mastery of the classical language. The κλίμα Λάθας, the region of Lethe, is identical to the γοερὸς χώρος νεκύων in the next line. It would seem that here we do not see any more hope or expectation of an afterlife than was the case in the traditional and gloomy ancient Hebrew conception of *she'ol*. As we will presently see, there is a great variety in this respect even in the few inscriptions that we will discuss in this short paper. Finally it should be noticed here that the motif of dying ἄτεκνος, like the one of dying as an ἄγαμος, is in ancient epitaphs one of the most frequent expressions of sorrow over those who had died as ἄωροι, the untimely dead being in the ideas of most ancients most lamentable persons.¹⁵ (Other instances from Leontopolis are nos. 1461, 1500, 1511.) This is one of the few Jewish instances of the *s(it) t(ibi) t(erra) l(euis)* motif in Jewish epitaphs; it is found only in five instances, four of which are from Leontopolis (in nos. 1484, 1488, 1530, 1530A) and one from Beth She'arim (*BS* II 167).¹⁶ I give here the Latin wording because in Latin epitaphs the formula in this (metrical) form has become so common that it is very frequently abbreviated to *s.t.t.l.* In Greek epitaphs it never became such a fixed formula, even though the source of the expression is a passage from Euripides' *Alcestis* 463-4 κούφα σοι χθὼν ἐπάνωθε πέσοι (cf. Meleager in *Anthologia Palatina* 7,461), a phrase that underwent all kinds of variations especially in Latin poets like Propertius, Ovid, and Martial. It is noteworthy that of the extremely popular Latin formula no Jewish instances have been recovered and also that the Greek formulas are again found only in Leontopolis and Beth She'arim.

A second instance from Leontopolis is 1490 (= *GV* 700, from 117 BCE):¹⁷

¹⁴ For the interchange of τ and θ see F.T. Gignac, *A Grammar of the Greek Papyri of the Roman and Byzantine Periods*, 2 vols. (Milano 1976-1981) I 134-8.

¹⁵ E. Griessmair, *Das Motiv der Mors Immatura in den griechischen metrischen Grabinschriften* (Innsbruck 1966). A.M. Vérilhac, *Παῖδες ἄωροι. Poésie funéraire*, 2 vols. (Athens 1978-1982), publishes and discusses some 200 Greek metrical epitaphs with this theme.

¹⁶ For this theme see R. Lattimore, *Themes in Greek and Latin Epitaphs* (Urbana 1942) 65-70.

¹⁷ See the edition and discussion of this epitaph in E. Bernand 1969 (n. 12) 89-92, on the basis of whose treatment I have slightly corrected D.M. Lewis' translation in *CPJ* III 153.

ὦδ' ὑπὸ τὸ σπιλᾶδος μέλαθρον, ξένε, κεῖται? ...]
 Δημᾶς, γῆρας ἀφείς μητρὸς ἐλεινοτά[της]
 καὶ τέκνα νήπι' ἐλεινά καὶ αὐστηρὰν πα[ράκοιτιν],
 πολλῶν ἀνθρώπων βοιθὸς ἐὼν σοφ[ία?]
 κλαύσατε τὸν προλιπόντα τὸ σεμνότα[τον ...]
 καὶ πόλιν, ἀνθρώπων δ' ἦθεα καὶ φιλίαν.
 Δ[η]μᾶς ὥ[ς] (ἐτῶν) λη',
 (ἔτους) νδ', Ἐθ[ύ]ρ γ'.
 Καὶ σύ, Ἀλέξανδρε,
 πασίφιλε καὶ ἀνέγ-
 κλ[η]τε, χρη[στ]έ, χ[αί]ρει.

Here under the shelter of this stone, stranger, lies
 Demas, deserting the old age of his very pitiable mother
 and his pitiable little children and his mourning wife.
 He helped many men by his skill.
 Weep for the man who has left the most honourable ...
 and his city, and the abodes and friendship of men.
 Demas, about 38 years old, in the 54th year, the third of (the month)
 Hathyr. You too, Alexander, friend of all and without reproach, ex-
 cellent one, farewell.

The epitaph consists of three distichs in poetic vocabulary and
 a prose ending. The restorations at the end of lines 1-5 are far
 from being certain. In line 1 it is possible to read κεῖμαι instead of
 κεῖται. Αὐστηρός (3) usually means 'harsh, bitter, severe', but
 here a sense like 'bitterly grieving' seems required. The fact that
 βοηθός (4) was pronounced as βοιθός enabled the poet to use it in
 this pentameter. Several scholars assume that Demas had been a
 doctor, but "helping many men by his skill" (?; or: "understand-
 ing", if one reads συνέσει) may also refer to another profession.
 The πόλις of line 6 must be Onias' temple-city, Leontopolis.
 Again, there is no mention of any expectation of life after death
 whatsoever. Lines 9-11 are an inscription by another hand, added
 later.

A third example from Leontopolis, is no. 1511 (= GV808, first
 century CE):

Εἰμὶ ἐγὼ Ἰησοῦς, ὁ φύς δὲ Φαμεῖς, παροδεῖτα,
 (ἐξήκοντα ἐτῶν) ἦλθον δ' εἰς Ἀείδαν.
 κλαύσατε δὴ ἅμα πάντας τὸν ἐξαπίνης μεταβάντα
 εἰς μυχὸν αἰώνων, ἐν σκοτίᾳ διάγειν.
 καὶ σὺ δέ, Δωσίθεε, κατάκλαέ με· σοὶ γὰρ ἀνάγκη
 δάκρισι πικροτάτοις τύμβω ἔμῳ προχέειν·
 τέκνον ἐμοὶ εἰ σ[ύ], ἐγὼ γὰρ ἀπῆλθον ἄτεκ<ν>ος·
 κλαύσατε πάντες ὁμοῦ Ἰησὸν δυσμενέα.

I am Jesus, my father was Phameis, passer-by,
 I went to Hades when I was sixty years old.
 Weep all together for the one who has suddenly gone
 to the secret place of eternity to dwell in darkness.
 And you, Dositheus, weep for me, for it is your duty
 to pour libations of bitterest tears on my tomb.
 You are my child, for I have gone away childless.
 All weep together for Jesus, the lifeless.

Some remarks may suffice.¹⁸ Line 1: Jesus was a very common name among Jews as a look in A. Schalit's *Namenwörterbuch zu Flavius Josephus* (Leiden 1968) immediately shows. The father (φύς = φύσας) of Jesus has an Egyptian name (elsewhere spelled as Παμήης). Line 2: the age of the deceased is indicated not by words but by the figure for 60. Line 3: πάντας stands for πάντες (see line 8), a vulgarism caused by the fact that the endings of the nominative and the accusative plural tended to merge in Koine Greek. In other epitaphs from Leontopolis as well, the wayfarer is often called upon to weep, a frequent motif in ancient epitaphs. Line 4 again makes clear that the expectation of post-mortal existence here scarcely differs from the Old Testament view of the gloomy *she'ol*. Lines 5-7 probably address Jesus' foster child, whom he, a childless man, regards as his own child. Δυσμενής in line 8 usually means 'hostile', which is impossible here. Possibly it means 'without μένος' in the sense of 'vital force, vitality'; hence the translation 'lifeless' or 'strengthless', cf. ἀμενηνός (Frey's rendering 'malheureux' seems inadequate).

As a final example from Leontopolis let us quote 1530a (= GV 850, probably first century CE):

Πεντήκο<ν>τα τριῶν ἐτέων κύκλον ἦδ' ἀνύσαντα
 αὐτὸς ὁ πανδαμάτωρ ἤρπασεν εἰς Αἴδην.
 ὦ χθῶν ἀμμοφανής, οἶον δέμας ἀμφικαλύπτεις
 Ἀβράμου ψυχῆς τοῦ μακαριστοτάτου.
 οὐκ ἀγέραστος ἔφυ γὰρ ἀνὰ πτόλιν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀρχῇ
 πανδήμῳ ἐθνικῇ ἐστέφετ' ἐν σοφίᾳ.
 δισσῶν γάρ τε τόπων πολιταρχῶν αὐτὸς ἐτεμῶ
 τὴν διμερῇ δαπάνῃ ἐξανύσας χάρισιν.
 πάντα δέ σοι, ἐπέοιχ' ὅσα τοι, ψυχῇ, πρὶν ἔκευθες,
 καὶ τέκνων ἀγαθῶν αὖξομεν γενεή.
 ἀλλὰ σύ, ὦ παροδεῖτα, ἰδὼν ἀγαθοῦ τάφον ἀνδρὸς
 ὄν τε κατευφημῶν τοῖα φράσας ἄπιθι·
 γαῖαν ἔχοις ἐλαφρὰν εἰς τὸν ἅπαντα χρόνον.

¹⁸ See the notes by Bernand 1969 (n. 12) 92-5.

When he had already achieved the span of 53 years,
 he who tames all himself snatched him off to Hades.
 O sandy earth, what a body you hide
 of the soul of the most blessed Abramós.
 For he was not without honour in the city, but wore the wreath
 of magistracy for the whole people in his wisdom.
 For you were honoured with the leadership of two places,
 generously performing the double duty.
 And everything which was fitting to you, soul, before you hid your-
 self,
 we, your family of good children, are increasing.
 But you, passer-by, seeing the grave of a good man,
 say these fair words to him and depart:
 "May the earth be light on you for ever."

Lewis adopts Louis Robert's suggestion that Abramós had been the head of two local Jewish communities.¹⁹ Notable again is the absence of any expression of belief in life after death, even in the case of an honoured community leader. In line 1 πεντήκοντα is an indication of the dropping of the *nu* in vulgar pronunciation. Line 2: πανδαμάτωρ is often used as an epithet of time (or the personified Χρόνος). Line 3: ἄμμοφάνης is a hapax but well-chosen in view of the bright yellow sand in the Egyptian desert. Line 4: μακάρ and μακαριστός are very frequently used of the dead. Lines 5-6: ἀρχῇ depends on ἐστεφέτο, he was honoured (lit. "crowned with a wreath") with a magistracy over the whole community (ἀρχή πάνδημος ἔθνική belonging together; ἔθνος is frequently used to designate a Jewish community, cf. ethnarch). Line 7: πολιταρχῶν means that Abraham was the head of the πολίτευμα of the Jews in Leontopolis. Lines 9-10 are very hard to translate; Bernand renders: "Tu as eu tous les honneurs convenables, chère âme, avant d'être enfoui, et, lignée de bons enfants, nous y ajoutons".²⁰ Lewis' translation, "everything which was fitting to your spirit", ignores the vocative character of ψυχῇ, which is often used as a term of affection for the deceased. Line 13: the adding of this verse with the well-known wish *sit tibi terra levis* causes the poem to end with two pentameters, which is very unusual.

Let us now look at the two instances from Palestine itself, from the catacombs of Beth She'arim, both of them dating from the third century CE. First BS II 127:

¹⁹ Lewis in *CPJ* III 162; L. Robert, *Hellenica*, 13 vols. (Paris 1940-1965) I 18-24, XI-XII 384-5.

²⁰ Bernand 1969 (n. 12) 96.

Κεῖμαι Λεοντείδης νέκυσ [Σ]αφοῦς υἱὸς Ἰοῦ]στος
 δς πάσης σοφίης δρεψάμενος κ[αρπὸ]ν
 λείψα φάος, δειλ[οὺς γ]ονέας ἀκα[χημέν]ους αἰε[ί],
 αὐτοκασιγνήτους [τ]ε, οἶμοι, ἐ[ν οἷς Β]εσάρ[οις]
 καί γ' ἐλθ[ὼν ε]ἰς Ἀθην' Ἰοῦστο[ς] ... αὐτ[ό]θι κεῖμα[ι],
 σὺν πόλλοισιν ἑοῖς, ἐπὶ ἧθελε Μοῖρα κραταίη.
 Θάρσει, Ἰοῦστε, οὐδεὶς ἀθάνατος.

I, the son of Leontius, lie dead, Justus, the son of Sappho,
 who, having plucked the fruit of all (kinds of) wisdom,
 left the light, my poor parents in endless mourning,
 and my brothers too, alas, in my Beth She'arim.
 And having gone to Hades, I, Justus, lie here
 with many of my own kindred, since mighty Fate so willed.
 Be of good courage, Justus, no one is immortal.

This poetic inscription, written in distichs, is a clear proof that Palestinian Jews were not only familiar with the Greek language but also with Greek literature, for the poem is full of Homeric phraseology and diction (although from a metrical point of view the poem is far from faultless). In line 1 Λεοντείδης is already an imitation of Homeric patronymics (cf. Ἀτρεΐδης for 'son of Atreus'). In line 2 the emphatical πάσης σοφίης seems to indicate that it was not only Jewish wisdom (i.e. Torah study) but also Greek learning that Justus had been involved in. In epigrams σοφία is often used for 'excellence in one of the arts'. "The Jew Justus, a citizen of that town which was for many decades a center of Jewish scholarship, and apparently also the author of the inscription, used this expression in the sense accepted in his Hellenized environment."²¹ Sirach 6,19-20 also speaks of the 'fruits' of wisdom. Λιπεῖν φάος in line 3 is a Homeric expression (*Od.* 11,93), as is ἀκαχημένους (*Od.* 9,62.105.565, etc.; on the faulty prosody here see Schwabe-Lifshitz 102). Αὐτοκασιγνήτος for 'brother' in line 4 is very common in Homer. Βέσαρα (line 4) for Beth She'arim occurs also in Josephus. 'To go to Hades' in line 5 in the sense of 'to die' is common both in Homer and in funerary epigraphy. In Jewish writings 'Hades' had lost its religious-mythological meaning (God of the underworld), as has already been remarked above; it occurs ten times in the New Testament. Μοῖρα κραταίη in line 6 (a typically Homeric verse ending) seems to be more difficult to reconcile with Jewish ideas. Moira was the Greek

²¹ Schwabe-Lifshitz 1974 (n. 2) ad loc., p. 100; on p. 101 they rightly emphasize that "in this one hexameter [read: pentameter] concepts from two different worlds meet and are combined."

goddess of fate, but apparently Justus sees no problem in using the term, in the tradition of Greek epigrams, to say that it was his destiny to die young. The final prose expression, θάρσει, οὐδείς ἀθάνατος, occurs very often in pagan epitaphs and its sense is much debated.²² This expression, with its variants (often οὐδείς ἀθάνατος is omitted), has been explained in various ways ranging from 'banale, trostlose Wendung' to an expression of 'courage et confiance' with respect to eternal life.²³ It is very difficult to say what in each individual case may have been the associations this expression evoked. At first sight it may seem to be an expression of resignation: no one is immortal, death is common to all people, so try to be courageous in the face of the inevitable. It cannot be ruled out that such sentiments existed among Jews, who definitely did not all believe in immortality of the soul or resurrection of the body.²⁴ That belief in afterlife was not part and parcel of everybody's Judaism is clearly evidenced by the slightly cynical epitaph of a Roman Jew called Leo (*CIJ* 32*), which runs "Friends, I await you here!" (*amici, ego uos hic exspecto*) and by two Jerusalem inscriptions one of which calls upon the survivors to enjoy themselves by eating and drinking (εὐφραίνεσθε οἱ ζῶντες, τὸ δὲ λοιπὸν [...] πεῖν ὅμα [= ἅμα] φαγεῖν),²⁵ whereas the other simply says, "No one can go up [from the grave]".²⁶ There is, however, some evidence that θάρσει, οὐδείς ἀθάνατος was also used by Jews who did believe in a blessed afterlife. In one of the Beth She'arim catacombs we find two inscriptions by one and the same hand, *BS* II 193 and 194.²⁷ The first runs θαρσεῖτε, πατέρες ὅσοι, οὐδείς ἀθάνατος, and the second εὐτυχῶς τῇ ὑμῶν ἀναστάσει.

²² E.g. G. Delling, "Speranda Futura", in his *Studien zum Neuen Testament und zum hellenistischen Judentum* (Göttingen 1970) 39-44, and M. Simon, "Θάρσει, οὐδείς ἀθάνατος", in his *Le christianisme antique et son contexte religieux* I (Tübingen 1981) 63-81.

²³ Delling 1970 (n. 22) 39, takes it to be an expression of gloomy resignation without any hope of afterlife; the more optimistic interpretation is advocated by Simon 1981 (n. 22) 65.

²⁴ Think, for example, of the Sadducees; see J. Le Moyne, *Les Sadducéens* (Paris 1972) 167-75.

²⁵ Published by B. Lifshitz, "Notes d'épigraphie palestinienne", *Revue Biblique* 73 (1966) 248-57, where he also refers to the many pagan parallels, e.g. in *GV* 716, 721, 905, 1112, 1218, 1301, 1333, 1925, 1978, 1987, 2029, etc. Cf. Luke 12,19 and 1 Cor. 15,32. It should be added that the frequently occurring nihilistic pagan formula *non fui, fui, non sum, non curo* (often abbreviated as *n.f.f.n.s.n.c.*) has no Jewish parallels.

²⁶ F.M. Cross, "A Note on a Burial Inscription from Mount Scopus", *IEJ* 33 (1983) 245-6.

²⁷ B. Lifshitz, "Beiträge zur palästinischen Epigraphik", *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins* 78 (1962) 73-4.

This seems to indicate that the use of the θάρσει formula could well go together with a belief in the resurrection. Moreover, θαρρεῖν/θαρσεῖν is already used by Plato in the context of a discussion of afterlife and immortality (*Phaedo* 63e, 78b, 87e, 95c). And in the famous Codex Bezae (D), at Luke 23,43, Jesus' answer to the repentant criminal's request, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom", significantly is: "Keep courage (θάρσει), today you will be with me in Paradise". Also in 4 Macc. 17,4 the context leaves us in no doubt that θάρσει is used there with regard to the expectation of a glorious afterlife. So there certainly was a use of θαρρεῖν/θαρσεῖν in connection with afterlife with very positive overtones. The exhortation θάρσει, οὐδεις ἄθνατος, and certainly θάρσει alone (which is frequent in Beth She'arim) was probably meant "to encourage the deceased to meet the dangers involved in the passage to the next world courageously".²⁸ (The use of θαρρεῖν in several passages in the New Testament demonstrates that it is employed most often in situations of real and dangerous tests which can be passed or afflictions which can be borne.²⁹) The passage to the next world is beset with dangers, according to ancient conceptions, because inimical powers or demons will try to bar the deceased from entry into a new and blessed existence.³⁰ Not only pagan Greeks and Romans but also Jews and Christians knew the notion of a dangerous heavenly ascent of the dead. Θάρσει wishes the dead the courage they need to be able to bring this journey to a successful conclusion. So there is good reason to connect this phrase with a positive belief in a blessed afterlife, even though that need not be the case in every instance.³¹

Let us look briefly at the second Palestinian instance, BS II 183:

Καρτερίης τόδε σῆμα λίψανον φέρει φθιτόν
 ἄφθιτον ἢ λαμπράν σῶζον μνίαν γεναίης.
 θήκατο δέ μιν ἐνθάδε Ζηνοβία

²⁸ Lifshitz 1974 (n. 2) 224.

²⁹ See the fine study of the word by C. Spicq, *Notes de lexicographie néotestamentaire* I (Fribourg—Göttingen 1978) 367-71.

³⁰ See e.g. F. Cumont, *After Life in Roman Paganism* (New Haven 1922) 148-69, and his *Recherches sur le symbolisme funéraire des Romains* (Paris 1942; repr. New York 1975), 104-76.

³¹ Firmicus Maternus *De errore profanarum religionum* 22,1 quotes the famous exclamation in the (Osiris?) mysteries, θαρρεῖτε μύσται τοῦ θεοῦ σεσωσμένου, ἔσται γὰρ ἡμῖν ἐκ πόνων σωτηρία. This formula indicates that in mystery religions as well θαρρεῖν was used in connection with 'salvation from pains', probably referring to afterlife; see R. Joly, "L'exhortation au courage (ΘΑΡΡΕΙΝ) dans les mystères", *Revue des Etudes Grecques* 68 (1955) 164-70.

μητέρος ἧς τίουσα [ἐφ]ημοσύνας.
 τοῦτό σοι, μακαρτάτη, καρπὸς σὸς ἐδίματο
 ἦν τέκες ἐξ ἀγανῶν εὐσεβίην λαγόνων,
 ῥέζει γὰρ κλυτὰ ἔργα ἐνὶ φθιμένοις αἰεὶ,
 ὄφρα δὴ ἄμφω καὶ μετὰ τέρμα βίου
 νέον ἢ δ' ἀσκήλευτον αὐθις ἔχοιτε πλοῦτον.

This tomb contains the dwindling remains of Karteria,
 preserving forever the illustrious memory of a noble woman.
 Zenobia brought her here for burial,
 fulfilling thus her mother's request.

For you, most blessed of women, your offspring,
 whom you bore from your gentle womb, your pious daughter
 —for she always does actions praiseworthy in the eyes of mortals—
 built this monument, so that even after the end of life's term
 both of you may enjoy again new and indestructible riches.

This epitaph is metrically even more deficient than the previous one (there is an intermingling of dactyls and trochees and the length of syllables is often ignored), but the spelling is correct apart from thrice ι instead of ει. Lines 1-4 contain a statement about mother and daughter, lines 5-7 address the mother, lines 8-9 address both mother and daughter. Again there is much Homeric phraseology and diction (ἄφθιτος, ἡέ, τίω, ἐός, ῥέζω, κλυτὰ ἔργα, ὄφρα, etc.).³² Zenobia is called 'pious' here because she always performs 'praiseworthy deeds', in this case especially the proper burial of her mother in the way this woman had asked her daughter to do it. The editors take the 'new and indestructible riches' to be the splendid tomb of Karteria, but it seems much more probable to see this as a reference to the 'treasure in heaven' that 'neither moth nor rust' can destroy and no thieves can steal (Matt. 6,20), that is, eternal life.

Finally, the most famous ancient Jewish funerary epigram, the only Latin one preserved, *CIJ* 470 (Rome, second to third century CE):

Hic Regina sita est tali contexta sepulcro
 quod coniunx statuit respondens eius amori.
 haec post bis denos secum transsegerat annum
 et quartum mensem restantibus octo diebus.
 rursum uictura, reditura ad lumina rursum,
 nam sperare potest ideo quod surgat in aeuom
 promissum quae uera fides dignisque piisque.
 quae meruit sedem uenerandi ruris habere.
 hoc tibi praestiterat pietas, hoc uita pudica,

³² For details see Schwabe-Lifshitz 1974 (n. 2) ad loc., pp. 157-67.

hoc et amor generis, hoc obseruantia legis.
coniugii meritum cuius tibi gloria curae.
horum factorum tibi sunt speranda futura,
de quibus et coniunx maestus solacia quaerit.

Here lies Regina, covered by such a tomb, which her husband set up as fitting to his love. After twice ten years she spent with him one year, four months and eight days more. She will live again, return to the light again, for she can hope that she will rise to the life promised, as a real assurance, to the worthy and the pious, in that she has deserved to possess an abode in the hallowed land. This your piety has assured you, this your chaste life, this your love for your people, this your observance of the Law, your devotion to your wedlock, the glory of which was dear to you. For all these deeds your hope of the future is assured. In this your sorrowing husband seeks his comfort.³³

This beautiful epitaph is unique not only in being our only Latin example but also in its unequivocal expression of central Jewish ideas and values. Regina's husband glorifies her faithfulness, her piety, her love of the Jewish people and her observance of the commandments of the Torah; and he also seeks comfort in his expectation of Regina's resurrection from the dead. This is one of the very few epitaphs that give such an unambiguous statement about the importance of Torah and piety and faith in the resurrection of the body. (I leave aside here the debated question of whether the phrase *meruit sedem uenerandi ruris habere* in line 8 is a reference to Paradise or to resurrection in the Holy Land.³⁴) The Latin and the prosody are relatively faultless.

We have now briefly looked at seven ancient Jewish metrical epitaphs. The material discussed is much too limited a sample to

³³ The translation is by H.J. Leon, *The Jews of Ancient Rome* (Philadelphia 1960) 335, but slightly corrected on the basis of the critical remarks by Lifshitz (Prolegomenon to *CII* 38), who also convincingly refutes Ferrua's thesis that the poem is Christian. Lifshitz' claim that *amor generis* (in line 10) does not mean 'love of the (Jewish) people' but 'love of (her) family' seems unfounded; cf. φιλόλαος.

³⁴ Leon 1960 (n. 33) 249, takes it to mean Paradise; so does Frey (n. 1) ad loc. But H.C.C. Cavallin, *Life after Death I* (Lund 1974) 168, U. Fischer, *Eschatologie und Jenseitserwartung im hellenistischen Diasporajudentum* (Berlin 1978) 235, and Delling 1970 (n. 22) 42, take it to mean that by her resurrection Regina will have a place in the holy land, referring to [H.L. Strack -] P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* III (München 1926) 828-9 and IV (1928) 1198. There Billerbeck quotes some later rabbinic testimonies to the effect that the resurrection will take place in the land of Israel. This does not imply that our inscription should be interpreted as sharing this notion, but it has to be conceded that *uenerandum rus* is an odd expression for Paradise. The matter must remain open.

base any general conclusions upon. Let me therefore close with some modest observations that our scanty sources do seem to permit us to make. We have seen a relatively good knowledge of the Greek (and Latin) language and literature in its archaic and classical forms, and also, albeit it to a lesser extent, of its prosody, among educated Jews in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. We also saw a restrained use of Greek mythological motifs, or at least terms, like Hades, Lethe and Moira. We could observe a variety of ideas about life after death, ranging from a gloomy pessimism to a lofty expectation of bodily resurrection or immortality of the soul. There certainly was no unanimity in this matter. We should, however, be careful in the use of the *argumentum e silentio* in this respect. It cannot be said that the writers of the vast majority of epitaphs in which there is no (clear) sign of belief in afterlife were non-believers in this respect. For, in spite of the fact that belief in the resurrection of the body was a much more central tenet in Christianity from the beginning than in Judaism, in ancient Christian epitaphs, too, this belief finds expression only seldomly.³⁵ Perhaps the most interesting and puzzling aspect of our topic is the uneven distribution of the material. Why only one metrical epitaph from Rome, the city from which we have more ancient Jewish epitaphs than from any other place, no less than some 600? Why are there no metrical epitaphs from Asia Minor, where Jews had lived for so long and were integrated so much more into society than in many other areas of the ancient world that it is only in Asia Minor that we find Jews in the highest echelons of society and politics? Why are 80 % of our metrical epitaphs from Leontopolis, a very important religious centre for Egyptian Jewry? And why two metrical epitaphs in Homeric Greek in the necropolis of Beth She'arim which was the burial-place of Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi, the codifier of the Mishnah, and of other rabbis and their families? Tertullian's *Quid Hierosolymis cum Athenis?* could be rephrased here as *Quid Mishnae cum Homero?* These are important and fascinating questions the answers to which either cannot (or not yet) be given at all or would require a much wider and more detailed treatment of all aspects than has been possible in this short paper.³⁶

³⁵ See I. Kajanto, "The Hereafter in Ancient Christian Epigraphy and Poetry", *Arctos* 12 (1978) 27-53.

³⁶ For further discussion I have to refer the reader to my book *Ancient Jewish Epitaphs* (n. 1).

THE POETIC CHARACTER OF REVELATION 4 AND 5

by

G.P. LUTTIKHUIZEN

In several passages of the Revelation of John, the One sitting on the throne and Christ, the Lamb, are honoured in direct speech by angels and other celestials. It is usual in scholarly literature to refer to these passages as (fragments of) hymnic texts. In modern text editions and translations they are often printed strophically, obviously because we are supposed to be concerned with poetic sentences.

It may be useful to begin this short essay with an elucidation of the terms 'hymnic' and 'poetic'. In my definition a hymn is a cultic song in which the emphasis is on the praise of God. Often the hymn opens with a call to worship God followed by a foundation which consists of an enumeration of God's deeds or qualities. Josef Kroll and, recently, Klaus Berger have rightly argued that it is not necessary to assume that every hymnic text has a factual cultic background.¹ Authors of early-Christian texts, for example the author of Revelation, may have made use of the hymnic style and so have created a literary 'hymn'. But also in that case the text has a cultic ring and will be associated by the reader with communal worship. In the course of my paper I will enter into the question of the extent to which the homages to God and Christ in the Revelation of John should be regarded as hymnic according to this definition.

As to the poetic character of these passages, it will be clear that in distinguishing poetry from prose texts we have to account for literary conventions.² Broadly speaking, in the oriental biblical tradition the boundary between poetry and prose is less sharp

¹ J. Kroll, *Die christliche Hymnodik* (1921; repr. Darmstadt 1968) 12; K. Berger, "Hellenistische Gattungen im Neuen Testament", *ANRWII* 25,2,1031-432, esp. 1150.

² A.N. Wilder, *Early Christian Rhetoric* (Cambridge, Mass. 1971) 89.

than in texts from the classical Greek tradition, in which metre counts as a characteristic feature of poetry. A metrical pattern cannot be found in New Testament texts. Actually the classical distinction of long and short syllables, which is the base of metrical poetry, no longer exists in the Hellenistic colloquial language in which most of the texts of the New Testament were written. The rhythm of poetry in the Semitic tradition does not lie in the alternation of long and short syllables but can best be described as a rhythm of words and thoughts: short clauses round a central notion, repeated in corresponding clauses. As is well-known, we often find two parallel clauses (*parallelismus membrorum*).³ The so-called hymnic passages of Revelation can indeed be viewed as poetic passages in the Semitic and Old Testament literary tradition. My contention, however, is that this is true also of large parts of their context.

In other words, the theme of this volume does not prompt me to pay attention exclusively to the alleged hymnic passages, for in this way the possible poetic character of the context would be neglected. I will confine myself in another way—by focusing on the complete text of just two chapters of the book: Rev. 4 and 5.

I begin with 4,1-8 and will pay attention in particular to the language and the structuring of thoughts. In 4,1 and 2a the seer tells how he was called by the same voice that he had heard before (1,10) to ascend to heaven, and how thereupon he went into ecstasies.

In verse 2b there is a change of style. This part of the text (4,2b-8) deserves our special interest. Here the seer describes what was revealed to him in God's throne hall. It may be noted that the prophetic author does not present a picture of God's heavenly abode at a given moment in time. In a vision he has seen how it always *is* in heaven. What is highly characteristic of this passage is the almost total absence of verb forms. In v. 2b a continuous imperfect form is used (ἔκειτο) but in 3-8 we find mainly clauses without inflectional forms, alternated (in vv. 5 and 8) with the present tense.

Modern translations of this passage are somewhat misleading. In the *New English Bible*, for example, the present of verse 5 (ἐκπορεύονται) is rendered in the preterite tense: "From the throne *went out* flashes of lightning and peals of thunder." Likewise in

³ Cf. H. Kosmala, "Form and Structure in Ancient Hebrew Poetry", *Vetus Testamentum* 14 (1964) 423-45, and R.C. Tannehill, "The Magnificat as Poem", *Journal of Biblical Literature* 93 (1974) 263-75.

verse 8 the present forms γέμουσιν and ἔχουσιν are converted into the past tense: "The four living creatures, each of them with six wings, *had* eyes all over, inside and out; and by day and by night without a pause they *sang* ..." But precisely because it is revealed to the seer how it *is* in heaven, he is able to write in v. 8 about the continuous tribute to God by celestial beings.

So verses 2b-8 speak about God's eternal majesty in His heavenly throne hall. All that is told in later chapters takes place in lower regions, under the enduring majesty of the Almighty, and the listener or reader of the text is certainly expected to be aware of the unchanging magnificence of the παντοκράτωρ and of the never ending tribute paid to Him.

Let us examine the structure of verses 2b-8 more closely. This whole section—not just the homage to God by the four living creatures worded in direct speech (v. 8b)—is markedly structured. Note, however, that the conventional verse divisions (originated by the famous Parisian printer and publisher Robert Estienne or Stephanus, in his edition of 1551) interfere with this structure.

Verses 2b-3 first mention the throne in heaven, then the One who is sitting on this throne; thereupon follows a description of the One sitting on the throne and of the rainbow round about the throne.

This pattern is repeated in verse 4: first the twenty-four thrones are mentioned—they are situated round about God's throne—, then we are told that twenty-four elders are sitting on these thrones and there follows a description of their appearance.

It would seem that verses 5-6a refer to the space between God's throne and the elders. From the throne come flashes of lightning, and sounds, and peals of thunder; before the throne are seven lighted torches and, also before the throne, a sea which appears as glass, clear as crystal.

Finally verses 6b-8 describe the four living creatures near to the divine throne. Once again we first hear about the place where they are located. Then the celestial animals are mentioned and the appearance of each of them is described. The incessant praise of God by these four living creatures concludes this part of the text. It is indeed a conclusion, yet we could almost describe it as an inclusion, since with this homage to God the attention is taken back to God, to whom the opening scene (verses 2b-3) is devoted.

The absence of aorist forms in verses 2b-8 gives this part of the

text a conspicuously static character indeed, which is wholly in accordance with its message. The static character is also caused by the regular structure and by the repetition of key words; in 4,2b-8, for example, the word *θρόνος* occurs no less than eleven times. No doubt, the *trishagion* is a poetic passage, but it is not a poetic passage in a prose context. It is an integral part of chapter 4, in its form as well as in its content.

We must bear in mind here that Revelation was written as a long letter intended to be read to Christians of Asia Minor gathered together in their house congregations.⁴ The original addressees, and perhaps those who read this letter to the congregation as well, are likely to have had another picture of the text than we have while reading the edition of Nestle-Aland or a modern translation. Though we do not know exactly how in ancient times texts were read, we may take it that the reader made a short pause after each clause (each *colon*)—roughly where in modern editions punctuation marks are added. If we tried to reproduce this situation, it would make sense to present a colometrical rendering of the complete text of Revelation and not just of the homages to God and Christ uttered in direct speech.

Indeed, the continuous tribute to God by the four living creatures is an integral part of the description of the heavenly throne scene. This is clear, too, when we approach this visionary description from another point of view. We can be sure that the original addressees were familiar with the diverse biblical allusions in the text. In particular verses 2b-8 recall the vision of God's majesty in the opening chapter of Ezekiel and the vision of the heavenly scene in Isaiah 6. The meaning of the passage under discussion is enhanced for the listener or reader by these biblical echoes. It should be emphasized, then, that it is not only the *trishagion* that stems from Isaiah 6 but also part of the preceding passage—the picture of celestial beings close to God's throne uttering the homage to God and the idea that each of these celestials has six wings. The intertextual references to the heavenly throne scenes in Ezekiel 1 and Isaiah 6 are likely to have played at least as significant a role in the assignment of meaning to this text as the possible association with communal worship on earth. This is important when we consider the question as to how far the *trishagion* can be defined as a 'hymnic' passage.

The song of praise in verse 8b is composed of three three-part

⁴ Cf. the instruction of 1,3, preceding the actual opening of the letter in 1,4.

utterances. The thrice holy stems from Isaiah 6,3. The threefold invocation of God, κύριος, ὁ θεός, ὁ παντοκράτωρ, is an alteration of the words *YHWH Sebaoth* in the Hebrew text of Isaiah 6,3.⁵ The last threefold designation, ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος, however, does not stem from Isaiah 6,3. It is a plausible assumption that the idea to the effect that the whole earth is full of God's glory was unacceptable to the author of Revelation. After all, in his eyes the earth is still ruled by the powers of evil. This part of the formula of verse 8b (ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ὢν) seems to belong to the tradition of Exodus 3,14 and Deuteronomy 32,39, where God reveals himself to be the One who is.⁶ It is characteristic of Revelation—though quite curious within the context of an everlasting laudation—to invoke God as the One who is to come (ὁ ἐρχόμενος). I will return to this invocation later.

I doubt that it is correct to consider verse 8b a hymnic passage. To be sure, the *sanctus*, in the version of Isaiah, has become part of the celebration of the Eucharist, but this occurred in a later time. Readers of the fifth century and later will have been reminded by 4,8b of the Christian liturgy. The first listeners, however, who were gathered together in their house churches in Asia Minor, could hardly find this connection.⁷ As I indicated above, it is much more plausible that this passage reminded them of the prophetic images of the heavenly court in Isaiah 6 and Ezekiel 1. Whereas the intertextual relation to biblical writings seems to me obvious, I doubt that this passage was associated by the original listeners with their communal worship. Moreover the addressees in Asia Minor may well also have had mental images of the ceremonial homages in the imperial court.

It may be observed that the homage to God by the four living creatures in 4,8b has another character than the praises of God by celestials in later parts of the book. In 4,8b we are concerned with a laudation which continues day and night, whereas the homages later on in the book are reactions to specific decisions or deeds by God or by Christ.

The incessant tribute to God in his heavenly court which is recorded in 1 Enoch (39,12) can also be traced back to Isaiah 6. We seem to be dealing here with a very special type of text. It is questionable whether we should designate these passages hymnic texts according to the definition given above.

⁵ LXX: κύριος σαβαώθ.

⁶ Almost the same formula occurs in Rev. 1,4 and 8.

⁷ Cf. W.C. van Unnik, "1 Clement 34 and the 'Sanctus'", *VC* 5 (1951) 247.

At the conclusion of chapter 4 the scene changes. The first sign of this change is the invocation of God in verse 8b as ὁ ἐρχόμενος.⁸ I agree with those authors who argue that in verses 9-11 the depiction of God's timeless majesty makes way for a picture of the future.⁹ Indeed these verses deal with the *coming* of God: the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders react to God's decision (not mentioned explicitly) to accept the rule over his creation. The phrase καὶ ὅταν δώσουσιν of verse 9 does not have iterative (as is supposed for example in the *New English Bible*) but future sense. In fact verses 9-11 anticipate the events described in chapter 5.

But let us first examine verses 9-11 more closely. In Aland's edition and in many translations verses 9-10 are printed as prose text and verse 11 as a poetic text. The sole difference, however, is that the last verse is worded in direct speech. For the rest, verses 9-11 are closely connected. We are clearly dealing with an antiphony: in verse 9 the four living creatures worship God and in verses 10-11 this worship is taken over by the twenty-four elders.¹⁰ It may be noticed that the tripartite praise of the eternal God in verse 8b reverberates in verse 9. The four living creatures pay δόξα and τιμή and εὐχαριστία to the One who is seated on the throne. In fact verse 9 renders in indirect speech a three-line doxology:

Glory and honour and thanks
To Him who is seated on the throne
To Him who lives for ever and ever.

This tripartite structure also characterizes the reaction of the elders. Note the three future verb forms: πεσοῦνται, προσκυνήσουσιν, and βαλοῦσιν. As to the poetic character I do not see a sharp contrast between verse 11 (the tribute to God by the twenty-four elders in direct speech) and verses 9 and 10 speaking about the tribute to God by the four living creatures and the ceremonial reaction to this by the twenty-four elders.¹¹

In its style and content verse 11a seems to be a rhythmically

⁸ K.-P. Jöns, *Das hymnische Evangelium* (Gütersloh 1971) 75 and 171-2, is right in seeing in the representation of God as the One who is to come the main theme of Revelation.

⁹ Among others E. Lohmeyer, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (Handbuch zum Neuen Testament 16; Tübingen 1953²) 49-50; G. Mussies, *The Morphology of Koine Greek as Used in the Apocalypse of St. John* (Leiden 1971) 342-7; Jöns (n. 8) 29-31; U.B. Müller, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (Ökumenischer Taschenbuchkommentar zum Neuen Testament 19; Gütersloh 1984) 141-3 and 147-9.

¹⁰ Jöns (n. 8) 31.

¹¹ Laying down one's crown before the throne of another ruler was a political gesture, cf. Tacitus *Ann.* 15,29.

formulated acclamation rather than the opening of a hymn. By the way, the aorist λαβεῖν is a further indication that God's acceptance of the rule over his whole creation is thought of here as a specific event of the future. The second phrase of verse 11, introduced with ὅτι, could in itself be part of a hymn, but, with Berger, I prefer to see it as an enlarged acclamation.¹² The addressees in Asia Minor will not have failed to notice the political connotation of the concluding verses of chapter 4.

Whereas 4,2b-8 speak about God's immutable majesty, 4,9-11 and chapter 5 refer to an event of the near future: God's judgement of the world, recorded in a sealed scroll in God's hand, will be executed. What Revelation makes clear is that although the decisive events, Christ's death and resurrection, belong to the past, and the believers already share in his dominion (Christ has established a kingdom of priests, 5,10; cf. 1,6), this dominion cannot be realized on earth as long as God's enemies are not defeated (see 1,7b). It is on account of his death and resurrection that Christ is qualified to open the seals and so to give effect to the book's content.

Central to the whole of chapter 5 is verse 7: the Lamb went and took the scroll from the right hand of the One who is seated on the throne. In the rest of this chapter the Lamb is honoured for this deed throughout heaven, on earth and in the world below. In verses 8-10 the honouring is begun by the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders, the same who, in the concluding verses of chapter 4, as celestial vassals, have acclaimed and honoured the One seated on the throne. In verses 11-12 a countless multitude of angels takes over the honouring of the Lamb by these high celestial creatures, and in verse 13 all creatures join in. Verse 14 forms the conclusion of the section that began with 4,9. Even more than 4,8b, this conclusion has the character of an inclusion: the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders, the first to honour God for his decision to accept dominion over the whole creation, now subscribe to the honouring of the One sitting on the throne, and the Lamb, by all creatures in the whole universe.

In Aland's edition the homages in direct speech are again printed as lines of poetry. The first tribute to the Lamb in 5,9 can be regarded as the counterpart of the tribute to the One seated on the throne in 4,11. The two passages have in common the

¹² Berger (n. 1) 1151.

formula ἄξιός ἐστι λαβεῖν as well as the foundation with a clause introduced by ὅτι. This means that in 5,9 we have another example of the same literary genre, an enlarged acclamation. In 5,9 the acclaim is presented as “a new song”, which the listeners may have recognized as a biblical notion.¹³

The homage by countless angels in v. 12 can also be characterized as an acclamation, the more so since—according to the majority of the manuscripts—the term ἄξιός has been replaced by what seems to be the impersonal expression ἄξιόν ἐστιν (to be translated as: “It is appropriate that ...”) and since the causal clause with ὅτι is absent.

The reaction by all creatures of the universe to the acceptance of the scroll by the Lamb (v. 13b) corresponds with the doxological homage paid to God by the four living creatures in 4,9. A point of difference, as we have seen, is that the homage of 4,9 is worded in indirect speech, while that of 5,13b is cited directly. Furthermore the doxology of 5,13 is uttered by all creatures in the whole universe and it is addressed not only to the One who is seated on the throne but also to the Lamb.

I conclude with two observations. The first is that the poetical character of Revelation deserves a more thorough examination. This aspect of the book has not been given serious attention so far, presumably because other aspects of this writing—for example the grammatical component of its language and the possible Semitisms—have commanded so much attention. Second, the celestial homages to God and Christ, the alleged hymnic passages, require further investigation. In exploring this matter one should be led by the question of how the original addressees in Asia Minor may have understood these celestial tributes.

¹³ Ps. 33,3; 40,4; 96,1; 98,1; 144,9; 149,1 (LXX: ἕσμα καινόν or ᾠδὴ καινή).

DIE *ORACULA SIBYLLINA* IN DEN
FRÜHCHRISTLICHEN GRIECHISCHEN SCHRIFTEN
VON JUSTIN BIS ORIGENES (150—250 NACH CHR.)

von

G.J.M. BARTELINK

Die 12 Bücher voller Lücken der *Oracula Sibyllina*, gut 4200 griechische Hexameter, bilden ein heterogenes Ganzes. Sie sind in einer Periode von mehr als 700 Jahren entstanden, worin die ursprünglich heidnischen Texte zum größten Teil einen Judaisierungs- und Christianisierungsprozeß erfahren haben. Ein anonym christlicher Autor, wahrscheinlich aus byzantinischer Zeit, hat der Sammlung einen Prosaprolog beigegeben mit Bemerkungen über theologische Aspekte und über die einzelnen Sibyllen, welche die spätere Tradition kannte.¹ Heterogen ist auch die geographische Herkunft der bunten Sammlung: während große Teile aus Ägypten stammen, ist die Herkunft anderer eher in Kleinasien oder Syrien zu suchen. Es scheint, daß alle aus Ägypten stammenden *Sibyllina*, wie wir sie heute kennen, einige Teile ausgenommen, jüdischer Herkunft sind. Das ist ungefähr die Hälfte, nämlich die Bücher 3 und 5, und 11 bis 14 einschließlich. Die christlichen *Sibyllina* dagegen finden ihren Ursprung eben nicht in Ägypten.

Ich werde mich hier auf einige Bemerkungen über die Rezeption der Sibyllinischen Orakel durch die christlichen griechischen Autoren von Justin bis Origenes beschränken, eine Periode von etwa hundert Jahren also. Wichtige Quellen wie Laktanz und Augustinus mit ihren umfangreichen Zitaten aus den Orakeln werden also nur indirekt herangezogen.²

¹ Ausgabe: J. Geffcken, *Die Oracula Sibyllina* (GCS 8; Berlin-Leipzig 1902; anast. Nachdr. 1967); cf. id., *Komposition und Entstehungszeit der Oracula Sibyllina* (TU N.F. 8,1; Berlin-Leipzig 1902).

² Über die *Oracula Sibyllina* bei Laktanz: Marie-Louise Guillaumin, "L'exploitation des Oracles sibyllins par Lactance et par le Discours à l'assemblée des saints", in *Lactance et son temps. Recherches actuelles. Actes du IVe Colloque d'Études historiques et patristiques, Chantilly, 21-23 septembre 1976* ed. J. Fontaine—M. Perrin (Collection de Théologie 48; Paris 1978) 185-202.

Es erscheint erwünscht, meiner Darlegung noch einige einführende Bemerkungen vorzuschicken. Daß diese *Oracula* in christlichen Kreisen akzeptiert und selbst öfters geschätzt wurden,³ geht aus ihrer jüdischen Vorgeschichte hervor. Bei den hellenistischen Juden in der Diaspora wurden seit dem zweiten Jahrhundert v. Chr. die *Sibyllina*, die in der heidnischen Welt eine große Autorität besaßen, mit Hilfe von Interpolationen und Bearbeitungen für propagandistische Zwecke geeignet gemacht, wie das auch mit solchen Schriften der Fall war, die von einigen griechischen Autoren der grauen Vorzeit—etwa Orpheus, Homer, Hesiod, Phocylides und Hecataeus—verfaßt oder unter deren Namen überliefert sind. Die Orakelsammlung wurde ihres Inhalts wegen gewählt, war jedoch auch dadurch gut verwendbar, daß die wenig feste Überlieferung, mehr als bei literarischen Werken, gelegentliche Einschübe von fremder Hand erleichterte. Die metrische Form hatte überdies, und das gilt auch für die Werke der übrigen genannten Autoren, Vorteile beim Memorieren. In der jüdischen, und später in der christlichen Tradition, konnte die Sibylle, als eine Prophetin, die drohendes Unheil verkündete, leicht als den alttestamentlichen Propheten ebenbürtig betrachtet werden. Und so, wie die Propheten öfters zur Buße ermahnten, wurde auch die Sibylle in den jüdisch-christlichen Orakeln öfters als zu Bußübungen auffordernd beschrieben.

Mögen auch die *Oracula Sibyllina* einen nur sehr bescheidenen literarischen Wert besitzen, als Zeugnis für das Bestehen einer Vielzahl von Auffassungen sind sie von eminenter Bedeutung. Große Teile enthalten Motive, die mit Ideen in den Apokryphen und Pseudepigraphen des Alten Testaments und namentlich in der jüdischen Apokalyptik verwandt sind. Aufgrund davon sind die weitgehend jüdisch bearbeiteten Bücher 3, 4 und 5 (übrigens auch die am meisten erforschten der Sammlung) in Übersetzung in die Pseudepigrapha von Kautzsch, Charles und Charlesworth

³ Im Mittelalter war der griechische Text im Westen unbekannt, aber die Erwähnung der *Oracula Sibyllina* bei Laktanz und Augustinus sowie der cumäischen Sibylle in Vergils vierter Ekloge hat ein gewisses Interesse erregt. Cf. A. Rzach, *RE* II A 2 (1923) 2073-2183; A.M. Kurfess, *Sibyllinische Weissagungen, Urtext und Übersetzung* (München 1951) 344-348; B. McGinn, "Joachim and the Sibyl", *Cîteaux* 24 (1973) 97-138; P.J. Alexander, "The Medieval Legend of the last Roman Emperor and its messianic Origin", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institute* 7,1 (1978) 1-15; B. McGinn, "Teste David cum Sibylla. The Significance of the Sibylline Tradition in the Middle Age", in *Women of the Medieval World. Essays in Honor of John H. Mundy* ed. J. Kirshner - S. Wemple (Oxford 1985) 7-35.

aufgenommen worden.⁴ Auf Vorbilder zurückblickend und unter Benutzung von bestehendem Material hat ein christlicher Autor die Bücher 6 und 7 gedichtet; auch ein großer Teil des achten Buches ist christlichen Ursprungs. So repräsentieren die einzelnen Bücher des uns bekannten Konglomerats unterschiedliche Traditionen. Um hierfür ein Beispiel anzuführen: Für Buch 4 ist charakteristisch, daß hier die Weltgeschichte in zehn Perioden aufgeteilt wird, wonach eine Schilderung des Weltendes folgt. Nicht weniger bezeichnend für dieses Buch, das wahrscheinlich in Syrien oder im Jordantal geschrieben wurde, dürfte die Ablehnung der Tempelopfer und das Interesse an der Taufe sein. Namentlich J. Collins⁵ hat neulich darauf hingewiesen, daß die jüdischen Auffassungen, wie diese aus den *Oracula* sprächen, alles andere als einheitlich seien, außerdem dürften sie gewiß nicht nur als ein Erzeugnis des ägyptischen Judentums bezeichnet werden, vielmehr widerspiegle sich in ihnen die Mannigfaltigkeit der jüdischen Gemeinschaften. So stammen die ursprünglich jüdischen Bücher 1 und 2 wahrscheinlich aus Kleinasien; nachher sind sie von einem christlichen Redaktor überarbeitet worden, ohne daß dabei der jüdische Inhalt wesentlich geändert wurde.

HERMAS

Um die Mitte des 2. Jhts. wird die Sibylle in einer christlichen Schrift zum ersten Mal genannt. Hermas' Reaktion auf das Erscheinen, in einer Vision, einer alten Frau, welche die Kirche symbolisierte (*Vis.* 2,4, GCS 48,77), zeigt uns, daß man damals in christlichen Kreisen mit der Sibylle vertraut war.

JUSTIN

Sodann ist Justin der Märtyrer der erste, der sich auf die *Oracula Sibyllina* berufen hat, als Fundort von Zeugnissen für die Wahr-

⁴ E. Kautzsch, *Die Apokryphen und Pseudepigraphen des Alten Testaments* übersetzt und herausgegeben II (Tübingen 1900); R.H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English, with Introductions and critical and explanatory Notes to the several Books, edited in conjunction with many scholars* II (Oxford 1913); J.C. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha I: Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments* (Garden City 1983).

⁵ Cf. J.J. Collins, "The Development of the Sibylline Tradition", *ANRW* II 20,1 (1987) 421-459; siehe auch id., *The Sibylline Oracles of Egyptian Judaism* (Soc. of Bibl. Lit. Diss. Ser. 13; Missoula 1974); *HJP* III,1 (1986) 618-654.

heit des Christentums. Es handelt sich hier übrigens nicht um Zitate, sondern um zwei Anspielungen, wobei die Sibylle neben Hystaspes, dem legendären Verfasser einer verlorengegangenen prophetischen Schrift,⁶ erwähnt wird. Beide verkündigen, so Justin (1 *Apol.* 20,1), daß die Erde einst durch Feuer vernichtet werden wird. An der zweiten Stelle (1 *Apol.* 44,12) ist nicht ganz klar, auf welche Gesetze der Apologet sich bezieht, wenn er sagt: "Durch die Aktivität der bösen Dämonen wurde die Todesstrafe verhängt über diejenigen, welche die Bücher des Hystaspes, der Sibylle oder der Propheten lesen".⁷

ATHENAGORAS

Das erste explizite Zitat in den christlichen Schriften finden wir im Abschnitt 30 der aus etwa 177 stammenden *Supplicatio* des Athenagoras.⁸ Dieser zitiert sechs Zeilen aus dem jüdischen Teil der *Oracula* (3,108-113, wie wir sie aus den Handschriften kennen), dieselben Verse, die Tertullian gut zwanzig Jahre später in *Ad nationes* anführt.⁹

Hier können wir zum ersten Mal in der christlichen Literatur feststellen, wie eine Initiative der hellenistischen Juden aus der Diaspora fortgesetzt wird, die, wie wir anfangs schon bemerkten, die Sibyllinischen Orakel als Propagandamaterial verwendeten. Man übernahm bestehende Verse, scheute sich aber ebensowenig, Änderungen und Interpolationen vorzunehmen. Und auch neue Verse, im traditionellen Stil gedichtet, wurden ohne weiteres als ursprünglich profane Texte ausgegeben. Sie sollten ja für die Heiden als Zeugnisse aus ihrem eigenen Milieu dienen, wodurch man sie leichter überzeugen konnte. So zitiert Flavius Josephus in seinen *Antiquitates Judaicae* 1,115 ff. acht Sibyllinische Verse (*Orac. Sib.* 3,99-106, GCS 8,53-54) als heidnische Bestätigung der aus der Bibel bekannten Geschichte vom Turmbau zu Babel, der Zerstörung des Turms und der darauffolgenden Sprachverwirrung.

⁶ Aus dieser Schrift zitieren Klemens von Alexandrien *Str.* 6,5,43 (GCS 52,453); Laktanz *Inst.* 7,15,19 (CSEL 19,634).

⁷ Vielleicht bezieht sich hierauf die Mitteilung des Juristen Julius Paulus (*Sent.* 5,21,3), Kaiser Tiberius habe die Todesstrafe über diejenigen verhängt, die Wahrsager und andere befragten, die über das Leben des Kaisers und über staatliche Interessen Vorhersagen machten.

⁸ Um dieselbe Zeit hat der heidnische Polemist Celsus die Christen der Interpolation der *Oracula Sibyllina* beschuldigt; man sehe hierfür Fußn. 26.

⁹ *Nat.* 2,12,35 (CCSL 1,64) *Ante enim Sibylla quam omnis litteratura <uestr>a, <i>lla scilicet Sibylla ueri <dei> uera uates etc.*

Der von Athenagoras angewendeten Verfahrensweise haben sich gleichfalls mehrere andere christliche Autoren bedient: Die Sibylle wird als mit den profanen Dichtern auf der gleichen Stufe stehend zitiert, wenn auch ihre Worte öfters stark christlich gefärbt sind. Wenn Athenagoras beweisen will, daß die heidnischen Götter eigentlich vergöttlichte Menschen sind, entnimmt er dem feindlichen Lager einen Teil seines Beweismaterials: nach Texten von Homer, Hesiod und Pindar über vergöttlichte Heroen (Heracles und Asclepius) führt er anschließend einige Verszeilen der Sibylle an.

THEOPHILUS VON ANTIOCHIEN

Viel umfangreicher ist das Material, das wir in *Ad Autolycum* des Theophilus von Antiochien finden. Dieser zitiert in seiner kurz nach 180 datierenden Schrift nicht weniger als viermal die *Oracula Sibyllina*, jedesmal im zweiten Buch. Zwei Zitate weisen eine respektable Länge auf (35 bzw. 48 Verse). Ein Zitat, das sich auf den Turmbau zu Babel bezieht, stammt aus dem dritten Buch der *Sibyllina*. Die drei anderen Zitate sind uns nicht durch die Manuskriptüberlieferung der *Sibyllina* bekannt, sondern es sind einzelne Fragmente, woraus übrigens auch einige spätere christliche Autoren ein paar Verse zitieren. Man hat es glaubhaft zu machen gewußt, daß diese Verse¹⁰ einem verlorengegangenen Anfang des dritten Buches der *Oracula Sibyllina*¹¹ entnommen worden sind. Ausgangspunkt dafür ist eine Notiz des Laktanz (in *Inst.* 4,6,5, CSEL 19,289), der den dritten und vierten Vers des ersten Fragments zitiert und folgendermaßen einführt: *Sibylla Erythraea in carminis sui principio, quod a summo deo exorsa est, filium dei ducem et imperatorem omnium his uersibus praedicat*. Sehr wahrscheinlich bezieht sich dieser Text auf das dritte Buch der *Oracula*, das für Laktanz das erste war.

Theophilus sagt ausdrücklich, daß das Zeugnis der Sibylle für ihn dem der großen alttestamentlichen Propheten gleichwertig ist. In *Ad Autolycum* 2,36 zitiert er, um seinen Argumenten Nachdruck zu verleihen, zuerst aus den Prophetenbüchern Jesaja und Jeremia, dann folgen einige Verse der Sibylle, "die", wie er selbst sagt, "bei den Griechen und den übrigen Völkern Prophetin war". Eine ähnliche enge Verbindung zwischen den Propheten und der Sibylle zeigt ein Text von Laktanz, der mit Hilfe einer

¹⁰ Cf. die Ausgabe von Geffcken, *Fragm.* 1-3 (227-232).

¹¹ Cf. Guillaumin 1976 (*Anm.* 2) 188.

Stelle aus den *Oracula Sibyllina* eine Aussage von Jesaja hervorheben will.¹²

Und auch an anderer Stelle bringt Laktanz sie auf eine Linie, indem er eine Parallele zwischen dem Schicksal sowohl der Prophetenworte als der *Oracula* zieht: In ihrer eigenen Zeit wurden sie meistens nicht verstanden, und erst *ex euentu* wurde die Tragweite ihrer Worte erkannt.¹³

TATIAN

Von den Apologeten muß hier noch Tatian genannt werden. In seiner *Oratio ad Graecos* (c. 41) erwähnt dieser die Sibylle einmal, und zwar in einem wesentlichen Bestandteil seiner Darlegung. Tatian arbeitet hier die These weiter aus, daß Moses, der als ältester Gesetzgeber die jüdische Kultur geprägt hatte, nicht nur früher gelebt habe als Homer, der älteste und wichtigste Exponent der griechischen Zivilisation, sondern auch früher als alle griechischen Dichter und Sänger vor ihm. In der von Tatian aufgezählten Reihe wird auch die Sibylle genannt, nach Orpheus und den homerischen Sängern Demodocus und Phemius.

Das Thema ist wichtig für Tatian; geht es doch dem heftigen Bekämpfer der griechischen Rhetorik und Philosophie darum, den Altersvorzug der alten jüdischen heiligen Bücher vor den griechischen Schriften nachzuweisen. Indem er hervorhebt, daß Moses früher als Homer gelebt habe und die Propheten früher als die meisten anderen griechischen Schriftsteller, will der Apologet beweisen, daß die Elemente der Wahrheit, die man bisweilen auch bei den Heiden findet, durch die viel älteren jüdischen Schriften inspiriert worden sind.¹⁴ Anders als Theophilus suggeriert Tatian also, die Sibylle könne von den jüdischen Propheten abhängig sein.

Eusebius, der diese Tatianstelle in seiner *Praeparatio euangelica* zitiert hat,¹⁵ setzt auf Grund dieser Anschauung die Sibylle von

¹² *Or. Sib.* 6,8 (GCS 8,131); Laktanz *Inst.* 4,13,21 (CSEL 19,322; Jes. 11,1-3); cf. A. Momigliano, "Dalla Sibilla pagana alla Sibilla cristiana. Profezia come storia della religione", *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa, Cl. di Lettere e Filosofia* 17 (1987) 407-428.

¹³ Laktanz *Inst.* 4,15,26 (CSEL 19,336).

¹⁴ Cf. auch Klemens von Alexandrien *Str.* 1,21,108 (GCS 52,69); 5,14,6 (GCS 52,399). Siehe J. Pépin, "Le 'challenge' Homère-Moïse aux premiers siècles chrétiens", *Recherches de science religieuse* 39 (1955) 105-122; A.J. Droge, *Homer or Moses? Early Christian Interpretation of the History of Culture* (Hermeneutische Untersuchungen zur Theologie 26; Tübingen 1989).

¹⁵ *P.e.* 12,27 (GCS 43,1,600,10-13).

Erythraea denn auch spät in seiner *Chronik* an: 440 Jahre nach dem Trojanischen Krieg (= 744 v. Chr.).¹⁶ Damit steht Eusebius der Auffassung anderer Christen jedoch—zum Beispiel der seines Zeitgenossen Laktanz—diametral gegenüber, denen es primär darum ging, den Aussprüchen der Sibylle einen selbständigen und nicht einen sekundären Wert zuzusprechen, und die aus diesem Grund die traditionelle sehr frühe Datierung beibehielten.¹⁷

KLEMENS VON ALEXANDRIEN

Eine ganze Reihe von Zitaten aus den *Oracula* finden wir bei Klemens von Alexandrien. Zwischen zahlreichen Zitaten aus der profanen Literatur, mit denen Klemens seiner Auffassung, es bestehe auch außerhalb der Kirche eine Gottesoffenbarung, Nachdruck verleihen will,¹⁸ haben auch die *Sibyllina* ihren Platz. Nachdem er sich bei seinem Versuch, zwischen der hellenischen Kultur und dem Christentum eine Brücke zu schlagen, zuerst auf die Philosophen und Dichter aus der heidnischen Umwelt berufen hat, nennt er anschließend die jüdischen Propheten (*Protr.* 8,77,2, GCS 54,59) als diejenigen, die den Vorzug verdienten, weil sie—stilistischem Schmuck abgeneigt—den Weg zum Heil gezeigt hätten. Es ist bezeichnend für seine offene Einstellung, daß er dabei der Sibylle mit ihrem Aufruf, den einen, wahren Gott zu verehren, den Vorrang zuerkennt, selbst vor den großen jüdischen Propheten Jeremia und Jesaja. "Nun möge gleich zu Anfang die Prophetin die Sibylle das Lied unseres Heils singen", so leitet er diese Stelle ein, worauf ein Zitat von acht Zeilen folgt.¹⁹

In der verhältnismäßig kurzen Schrift *Protrepticus* kommen nicht weniger als acht Zitate aus den *Oracula Sibyllina* vor, darunter eins unter dem Namen von Orpheus.²⁰ Dieses letzte Zitat veranlaßt Klemens zu der Bemerkung, die Griechen hätten einige Funken des göttlichen Logos aufgefangen, wodurch sie imstande gewesen seien, einzelne Aspekte der Wahrheit zu verkünden, eine These, die wir zuerst bei Justinus dem Märtyrer finden.

Der Typus der Zitate aus den *Oracula Sibyllina* ist in Übereinstimmung mit dem adhortativen Charakter des *Protrepticus*: es

¹⁶ *Chron.* (155 F) (GCS 47,89b).

¹⁷ Laktanz *Inst.* 1,6,9 (CSEL 19,21,12-13).

¹⁸ Cf. Augustin *Bapt.* 5,27,38 (PL 43,196), wo die cumäische Sibylle, neben Hiob aus dem Lande Hus, als Beweis hierfür erwähnt wird.

¹⁹ *Or. Sib.* 1,28-35 (GCS 8,7).

²⁰ *Protr.* 7,74,6 (GCS 54,57); *Or. Sib.* 3,624-625 (GCS 8,80).

handelt sich an erster Stelle um Ermahnungen, die dornigen Pfade der Finsternis (d.h. die irrigen Auffassungen über die Götter) zu verlassen, das Licht zu suchen²¹ und sich von den Tempeln und heidnischen Opfern abzuwenden.²² Klemens zitiert die Verse, in denen die Sibylle sich Prophetin nennt, nicht Prophetin des vorhersagenden Apollo, sondern des großen Gottes.²³ Bequem konnte er auch die Verse verwenden, mit denen sie das Ende des Polytheismus prophezeit und die bevorstehende Zerstörung der großen heidnischen Tempel, wie der Isis- und Serapistempel in Ägypten, in Klemens' eigener Umgebung.²⁴ So läßt Klemens die Stimme der Sibylle gut vernehmlich im Chor der Propheten und derjenigen mitklingen, welche den endgültigen Sieg des Monotheismus vorhersagten.

Gegen Ende des *Protrepticus* (10,96,4, GCS 54,70) läßt Klemens in seiner Polemik gegen die Vielgötterei die Sibylle noch einmal zu Worte kommen mit einer Warnung gegen diejenigen, die so weit gingen, daß sie selbst Menschen zu Göttern ausriefen, wie Alexander den Großen, dessen Tod in Babylon doch eine historische Tatsache gewesen sei (*Orac. Sib.* 5,6, GCS 8,103).

Angesichts der ganz anderen Thematik braucht es nicht wunderzunehmen, daß die beiden Zitate aus den *Oracula Sibyllina* in dem *Paedagogus* eine andere Atmosphäre atmen. Sie stehen unmittelbar hintereinander. Wenngleich Klemens sich in dem *Paedagogus* an aus dem Heidentum bekehrte Christen wendet, redet er bisweilen zu ihnen, als wären sie immer noch der Vergangenheit verhaftet. "Eure Poesie schreibt", sagt er mit einer seiner vagen Formulierungen. "Eure" bedeutet hier: "zum Milieu gehörend, aus dem ihr stammt". Der *Paedagogus* wimmelt von Zitaten ethischen Charakters. Hierzu passen auch die beiden Zitate aus den *Oracula Sibyllina* (5,166-168, GCS 8,112; 4,33-34, GCS 8,93); sie sollen der Ablehnung eines lockeren Lebenswandels und dem Lob der Selbstbeherrschung mehr Nachdruck verleihen.

In den *Stromateis* bietet die Sibylle Klemens ein wichtiges Zeugnis über den einen, wahren Gott. Die zwei Aussprüche in *Str.* 5 folgen beide auf Zitate aus der profanen Literatur; nach Aussagen von Antisthenes und Xenophon (Gott ist niemandem gleich und niemand kann ihn erschauen) folgen vier Verse aus den

²¹ *Protr.* 2,27,4-5 (GCS 54,20); *Or. Sib.* Fr. 1,23-25 und 27 (GCS 8,229).

²² *Protr.* 4,62,1 (GCS 54,47); *Or. Sib.* 4,24 und 27-30 (GCS 8,92-93).

²³ *Protr.* 4,50,1 (GCS 54,38); *Or. Sib.* 4,4-7 (GCS 8,91).

²⁴ *Protr.* 4,50,2 (GCS 54,38); *Or. Sib.* 5,294 und 296-297 (GCS 8,118) (Zerstörung des Tempels zu Ephesus); *Protr.* 4,50,3 (GCS 54,39); *Or. Sib.* 5,484-485 und 487-488 (GCS 8,127) (Zerstörung des Isis- und Osiristempels).

Oracula Sibyllina (Fragm. 1,10-13, GCS 8,228), die deutlich diesen Gedankengang fortsetzen: "Denn welcher Sterbliche kann den himmlischen und wahren Gott, den unsterblichen, mit seinen Augen schauen?" (*Str.* 5,14,108,6, GCS 52,399). Und als Klemens ein wenig weiter (*Str.* 5,14,115,4, GCS 52,404) erklärt, Timaeus von Locri habe seine Auffassung über das eine Urprinzip der Bibel entnommen (Dtn. 6,4.13 "Dein Herr Gott ist der einzige Herr"), läßt er die Sibylle gleich hinzufügen, daß der eine Gott für alle klar und unfehlbar ist.

So sehen wir die Sibylle bei Klemens in wechselnder Beleuchtung. "Funken des Logos" verkündend ist sie wie eine Prophetin des einen unsichtbaren Gottes und des wahren Heils. Auch lehnt sie, ebenso wie die alttestamentlichen Propheten, die Unmoral der Menschen ab und sagt den baldigen Untergang des Polytheismus voraus. Bei Klemens finden wir übrigens noch nicht die Verse über den Untergang Roms und die eschatologischen Katastrophen, die über die Welt kommen werden. Die Stimme der Sibylle wird gerne gehört, weil sie, ebenso wie gelegentlich die griechischen Dichter und Seher, die Worte der jüdischen Propheten bestätigt. In dieser Hinsicht schließt Klemens sich der Thematik der Apologeten an.

DIE PSEUDOJUSTINISCHE *COHORTATIO AD GRAECOS*

Die wahrscheinlich um 200 geschriebene *Cohortatio ad Graecos*, eine kurze, aber merkwürdige Abhandlung, spricht ausführlich über die *Sibyllina*, die als Zeugnis für den Monotheismus und wegen der Prophezeiung von Christi Menschwerdung und Taten angeführt werden. Im Gegensatz zu beispielsweise Laktanz, der ein gutes Jahrhundert später zehn Sibyllen aufzählt (*Inst.* 1,6,6-14, CSEL 19,20-23), erwähnt der unbekannte Schriftsteller nur eine, die babylonische. Seiner Meinung nach war sie die Tochter des chaldäischen Historiographen Berossus gewesen und später nach dem Westen gezogen, um sich dort in Cumae niederzulassen. Der Standpunkt des anonymen Autors ist klar: Für ihn sind die Sibyllinischen Orakel eine authentische Quelle der Wahrheit. "Auch ihr könnt", sagt er zu den Heiden, "von der ehrwürdigen Sibylle leicht zum Teil die wahre Gottesverehrung kennenlernen. Von einer mächtigen Beseelung erfaßt, unterrichtet sie mittels Orakelsprüche Lehren, welche den Weissagungen der Propheten nahe zu stehen scheinen" (c.37). Das Interesse des Verfassers an der Sibylle wurde offenbar dadurch gefördert, daß er aus Au-

topsie die berühmte Sibyllengrotte bei Cumae kannte; ihre ausführliche Beschreibung ist für uns fesselnde Lektüre. Um seine Ausführungen zu unterstützen, führt er einen Text aus Platos *Meno* (99CD) an, wo dieser über diejenigen spricht, die von Gottes wegen inspiriert werden. Weiter weist er darauf hin, daß die metrischen und stilistischen Unvollkommenheiten in den *Oracula* ihrer Botschaft untergeordnet sind: sie erklärten sich daraus, daß die Sibylle sich nach dem Augenblick der göttlichen Beseelung nicht mehr an das Gehörte erinnert habe oder es handle sich um Fehler der oft wenig gebildeten *notarii*, die ihre Worte aufzeichneten. Um die Wichtigkeit der göttlichen Inspiration eigens hervorzuheben, wiederholt der Autor zweimal Platos Worte über die Orakelpropheten: "sie verkünden viele wichtige Sachen, ohne selbst etwas von dem zu erkennen, was sie sagen" (c.37 *in fine*). Auch für den Verfasser der *Cohortatio* steht die Sibylle aus der profanen Welt den jüdischen Propheten nahe, die besser über Gott gesprochen haben als die heidnischen Philosophen.

ORIGENES

Bei Origenes sind kaum Spuren der Sibylle vorhanden. Dieser Autor, der übrigens selbst die *Oracula Sibyllina*, denen er offenbar keinen großen Wert beilegte, nirgendwo zitiert,²⁵ sah sich gezwungen, sich gegen Celsus' Vorwurf zu wehren, die Christen hätten selbst in den Sibyllinischen Orakeln vielerlei Zusätze angebracht.²⁶ Celsus warf den Christen vor, sie hätten unzuverlässige und absichtlich gefälschte Texte in Umlauf gebracht, so daß sie sich darauf zu Unrecht beriefen. Mit diesem Vorwurf hatte Celsus völlig recht: durch jüdische und nachher christliche Eingriffe waren die *Sibyllina* ja tendenziösen Änderungen, Interpolationen und Zusätzen unterworfen.

Wiewohl Origenes selbst wenig an den *Oracula* interessiert war, setzte er sich mit Celsus' Angriffen kämpferisch auseinander. Dieser versage, da er kein konkretes Beispiel nenne und nirgendwo Argumente anführe. Er hätte wenigstens, um seine Bezeichnung zu begründen, die heutigen Textformen mit früheren Handschriften vergleichen sollen. Das wäre der richtige Weg gewesen, um eventuelle Unregelmäßigkeiten aufzudecken.

²⁵ Auch Eusebius von Caesarea zitiert die *Sibyllina* nicht; man findet sie bei ihm nur in Zitaten anderer Autoren in der *Praeparatio evangelica*.

²⁶ *Cels.* 7,53, GCS 3,203: "Jetzt aber könnt ihr viele gotteslästerliche Ideen in ihre Schriften interpolieren". Vgl. auch Constantinus I *Or. s.c.* 19 (GCS 7,181).

Auch Laktanz hat sich gegen einen gleichartigen Angriff zur Wehr gesetzt. Nach Anführung einiger Zitate aus dem achten und sechsten Buch der *Oracula Sibyllina*, christlichen Teilen also (*Inst.* 4,15,26, CSEL 19,336), bemerkt er, daß die Authentizität dieser Verse von manchen Gegnern angefochten werde (*non esse illa carmina Sibyllina, sed a nostris ficta atque composita*). Laktanz entgegnet darauf, daß die *Oracula Sibyllina*, aus denen die Christen zitieren, alt sind und er rät seinen Opponenten, bei Cicero, Varro und anderen alten Autoren nachzuschlagen, die vor Christi Geburt gelebt haben und die Bücher der erythräischen und anderen Sibyllen erwähnen, denen die Christen ihre Zitate entnehmen.

Es ist klar: Trotz christlicher Bearbeitungen haben die Christen fast ausnahmslos die Sibyllinischen Orakel als ein nichtchristliches Zeugnis für die Wahrheit angeführt.

THE PLACE OF POETRY IN LATIN CHRISTIANITY

by

W. EVENEPOEL

Under this broad title I will deal primarily with the following topics: (1) How much room did Christianity leave to poetic activity? (2) What importance did Christians attach to the emergence of a Christian poetry? (3) What functions did early Christian poetry fulfil? The question of the Christian attitude toward pagan verses or poetry in the Bible will only be dealt with within the context of these questions.

The evidence which can be adduced in order to answer these questions consists of: (1) pronouncements of Christian poets themselves; (2) statements of Christian prose writers, Church Fathers and ecclesiastical authorities; (3) some relevant facts.¹

¹ How was this material assembled? With an eye to the present paper, I supplemented my earlier casual jottings with the aid of various publications. The following titles proved particularly useful: P.G. van der Nat, *Divinus vere poeta. Enige beschouwingen over ontstaan en karakter der christelijke Latijnse poëzie* (Leiden 1963). Id., "Zu den Voraussetzungen der christlichen Literatur: die Zeugnisse von Minucius Felix und Laktanz", in *Christianisme et formes littéraires de l'Antiquité Tardive en Occident* (Entretiens sur l'Antiquité Classique 23) ed. Manfred Fuhrmann (Genève 1977) 191-235. Reinhart Herzog, *Die Biblepik der lateinischen Spätantike. Formgeschichte einer erbaulichen Gattung I* (München 1975). Paul Klopsch, *Einführung in die Dichtungslehren des lateinischen Mittelalters* (Darmstadt 1980); the early Christian "Dichtungslehren" are dealt with in the introductory portion of this booklet on the Middle Ages; in a similar *Einführung* concerning the poetics of Graeco-Roman Antiquity, by M. Fuhrmann, early Christian poetry is not discussed. Jacques Fontaine, *Naissance de la poésie dans l'Occident chrétien. Esquisse d'une histoire de la poésie chrétienne du IIIe au VIe siècle* (Paris 1981); this captivating work devotes continuous attention to the poetics of the writers studied. The recent *Spätantike*-issue of the journal *Philologus*, volume 132 of 1988. Reinhart Herzog (ed.), *Restauration und Erneuerung. Die lateinische Literatur von 284 bis 374 n. Chr.* (Handbuch der lateinischen Literatur der Antike 5; München 1989).

1. NOT OF THIS WORLD

In the first section of this paper I will follow in the wake of Van der Nat by recalling a few facts that will serve to make clear the initial attitude of the early Christians towards literature in general and poetry in particular.

The Christians of the first centuries were in principle (almost) exclusively concerned with religion and expected the rapid return of Christ. What they wrote had a practical orientation, directly serving Christian education or the struggle against pagans and 'heretics'.² Moreover, the first generations of Christians came primarily from the lower classes of society. The literal and popular Latin Bible translations made for them in the second century hardly came up to current standards of literature.³

Cultivated pagans, who could boast of a brilliant literary tradition, made no effort to conceal their disdain for the 'uncultured' Christians and their biblical writings.⁴ From Tertullian onward, Christian writers in the West as a rule⁵ reacted by stating that for them truth came first, not pretty words.⁶ Although these authors, as a result of their own classical training, felt attracted to the classical forms, they repudiated them from a theoretical point of view as mendacious rhetoric. Even when they themselves were actually producing highly rhetorical prose, they stated in principle and emphatically that they were merely continuing the work of the fishermen who were the first propagators of the Gospel and preferred the truth of a *sermo piscatorius*⁷ to the subtleties of philosophy and to the ornaments of rhetoric. A typical example of this

² Cf. Van der Nat 1977 (n. 1) 192-4.

³ Reference may be made to the reactions these translations evoked among the cultured, e.g., to name but two, Jerome *Epist.* 22,30 (CSEL 54,189): *si .. prophetam legere coepissem, sermo horrebat incultus*, and Augustine *Conf.* 3,5,9 (ed. M. Skutella, p. 42): *sed (sc. illa scriptura) uisa est mihi indigna, quam Tullianae dignitati compararem*. See further e.g. Herzog 1975 (n. 1) 180 n. 1; Van der Nat 1977 (n. 1) 200 n. 1; Harald Hagendahl, *Von Tertullian zu Cassiodor. Die profane literarische Tradition in dem lateinischen christlichen Schrifttum* (Göteborg 1983) 11; Salvatore Costanza, "Da Giovenco a Sedulio. I proemi degli 'Evangeliorum libri' e del 'Carmen Paschale'", *Civiltà classica e cristiana* 6 (1985) 253-86, esp. 261-2 n. 19.

⁴ See e.g. Pierre de Labriolle, *La réaction païenne* (Paris 1934), Index, s.v. *barbarie (accusation de)*, *foi irrationnelle*, "*rusticitas*", and H. Fuchs, s.v. "Bildung", *RAC* 2 (1954) 351.

⁵ Minucius Felix 14 (ed. J. Beaujeu, p. 19-20) is less rigid about *eloquentia*; cf. Van der Nat 1977 (n. 1) 201 ff.

⁶ See Van der Nat 1963 (n. 1) 14 and 1977 (n. 1) 200-1.

⁷ See G.J.M. Bartelink, "Sermo piscatorius. De 'visserstaal' van de apostelen", *Studia Catholica* 35 (1960) 267-73.

ambiguity is a passage in which Cyprian declaims in a highly rhetorical way against rhetoric (*Ad Donat.* 2, CSEL 3,1,4):

Cum de domino et de deo uox est, uocis pura sinceritas non eloquentiae uiribus nititur ad fidei argumenta sed rebus. Denique accipe

non diserta, sed fortia,
nec ad audientiae popularis inlecebram
culto sermone fucata,
sed ad diuinam indulgentiam praedicandam
rudi ueritate simplicia.

But when speech is concerned with the Lord God, the pure sincerity of speech depends not on the force of eloquence for the arguments in support of faith but on facts. Therefore, receive not eloquent words, but forceful ones, not decked out with cultivated rhetoric to entice a popular audience, but simple words of unvarnished truth for the proclaiming of God's mercy. (transl. R.J. Deferrari)⁸

Theoretically, then, *eloquentia* is repudiated not only as an end in itself but also as a means!

Classical poetry elicited strong opposition from the Christians. They summarized their verdict in terms such as *mendacia* and (*noxia*) *delectatio*. For what did classical poetry offer? Mythology, eroticism, and worldly play. The *delectatio* it aims at is wholly of this world and therefore to be rejected. Even as more and more cultured people turned to Christianity, people who were in fact strongly attracted to the *suauitas* of pagan poetry, pagan verses for a long time continued to be negatively characterized. In his *Carm.* 10 (an epistolary poem addressed to Ausonius), v. 37-8 (CSEL 30,25), Paulinus of Nola mentions the *uis sophorum callida* (the clever powers of philosophers), the *ars rhetorum* (the art of rhetoricians) and the *figmenta uatum* (the inventions of poets) in a single breath.

While classical (pagan) poetry was encountered in the schools and in cultural life, in the church people were confronted, from the outset, with verses from the Bible, namely psalms and canticles.⁹ This was true for the West, too. Paul Klopsch,¹⁰ on the basis

⁸ See Van der Nat 1977 (n. 1) 199-200 and Hagendahl 1983 (n. 3) 30-1.

⁹ Paul, *Col.* 3,16, presumably does not refer to three sharply distinguished categories of song (thus J. Szövényfi, s.v. "Hymnology", *New Catholic Encyclopedia* 7 [1967] 287); see Fontaine 1981 (n. 1) 30. See further on the terms in question A. Bastiaensen, "De termen *psalmus*, *hymnus*, *canticum* in de Latijnse oud-christelijke literatuur", *Noctes Noviomagenses J.C.F. Nuchelmans ... oblatae* ed. G.J.M. Bartelink—J.H. Brouwers (Weesp 1985) 19-28.

¹⁰ 1980 (n. 1) 1-2; see for the relevant testimonia Fontaine 1981 (n. 1) 127-8.

of an erroneous interpretation of the evidence for the reception of the hymns of Hilary of Poitiers in Gaul and for the composition of the hymns of Ambrose, assumes that in the beginning the Western church, unlike the Eastern, had no singing. Psalms and canticles, however, were not among the familiar forms of Graeco-Roman poetry and initially were not regarded or characterized as literature.

Accordingly—as is well-known and as has been clarified by Van der Nat¹¹—it was quite a while before Christians in the West took to writing classical (Christian) poems. Even as an ever increasing number of literates turned to Christianity, the idea of ‘poetic activity by Christians’ remained, in view of the facts sketched above, problematical. Poetry in the classical sense of the word was, even more than the rest of literature, a charged activity. It was by no means evident that a Christian would write ‘classical’ verses on Christian topics. Nor was it evident that a Christian would write ‘classical’ verses on classical topics. Nor, finally, was it evident that a Christian with a traditional schooling would write ‘biblical’ poems.

2. IN THIS WORLD, BUT NOT OF THIS WORLD

2.1. *Popular, Jewish and biblical poetic forms*

Poetry in the classical sense of the word may have been a loaded subject for Christians. However, it was inevitable that within the new community, within the framework of a living liturgy, poetry in one form or another, in particular forms suited for singing, would take shape.¹² The first evidence of poetic activities of the early Christians was situated, in the West as well as in the East, outside literature and outside the classical tradition. During the liturgical meetings of the first generations of Christians not only biblical songs, psalms and canticles were sung, but also songs, of Jewish or popular form, were produced *de proprio ingenio* (cf. Tertullian *Apol.* 39,18, CCSL 1,153), initially in Greek, later in Latin as well.

The oldest surviving example of Latin liturgical poetry, the

¹¹ See also Siegmur Döpp, “Die Blütezeit lateinischer Literatur in der Spätantike (350-430 n. Chr.). Charakteristika einer Epoche”, *Philologus* 132 (1988) 32-3.

¹² Cf. Yves-Marie Duval, “La poésie latine au IV^e siècle de notre ère”, *BAGB* 1987, 176-7.

Psalmus responsorius, is still set in a popular form and stands outside the classical tradition. The *psalmus*, a hymn to Christ, which probably originated in the third century, is a rhythmic abecedary with a refrain.¹³ Hilary of Poitiers, who created a more classical liturgical hymn, also chose, for two of his three surviving hymns, the abecedarian form. Sedulius, too, still used this form for his hymn *A solis ortus cardine*. On the other hand, the *Psalmus responsorius* found a continuation in the abecedarian *psalmi* of Augustine and Fulgentius. Augustine wrote his *Psalmus contra partem Donati* so that the simple members of his ecclesiastical community would be able to defend themselves against the Donatists (cf. *Retract.* 1,19 [20], CSEL 36,96-7). Fulgentius' *psalmus* was also of a polemical nature, aimed more specifically against the Arians. Compare what follows below on the more classical liturgical hymns of Hilary and Ambrose.¹⁴

2.2. Room for a more literary poetic activity

Only gradually room was made for "poems conceived as works of art in accordance with the ancient tradition",¹⁵ which were destined for a cultured public. The rise of classical Christian poetry was due first and foremost to the elementary fact that from a certain moment, i.e. after 313, an increasing number of cultured Romans converted to Christianity, among them some who, after becoming Christian, still desired to write poetry in the traditional sense of the word and who wanted to connect this activity in one way or another with their Christian conviction.

After 313 the mentality of the Christians changed as well. The preoccupation with the end of time became less pronounced. The fact that the emperor chose the Christian side, which meant that Rome and Christianity were no longer opposites, also brought about a change in the attitude towards pagan literature in general and poetry in particular. On the one hand, considerable reserve persisted vis-à-vis pagan verse, but on the other hand,

¹³ Herzog 1989 (n. 1) 328-9, par. 559.

¹⁴ We will not dwell here on some other non-classical poetic forms: 1) the quasi-metrical verses of Commodianus (third century?), whose non-classical option was not retained; 2) the rhythmical prose hymns of Marius Victorinus (fourth century), a form of *hieroi logoi* current in Greek philosophical and religious writings. See Herzog 1989 (n. 1) 220-1, par. 542, and 352, par. 564, and Duval 1987 (n. 12) 165-6 and 177.

¹⁵ Van der Nat 1963 (n. 1) 7. See on the birth "einer nichtliturgischen, antikisierenden, christlichen Dichtung", besides Van der Nat, e.g. Wolfgang Kirsch, *Die lateinische Versepeik des 4. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin 1989) 57.

in practice varying attempts were made to restore, use, convert, and christianize the beloved and prestigious poetic art.¹⁶ Cases in point are the *interpretatio christiana* of Virgil since Constantine the Great, as well as the intense and wide-ranging incorporation of the same poet in Christian poetry since Juvenius. From the outset Virgil, in the fourth century the symbol *par excellence* of Roman culture and tradition, is amply used in various ways by classically oriented early Christian poets.

Typical of the evolution of the attitude of the Christians towards literature is the fact that from a given moment they start to emphasize the literary value of the Bible.¹⁷ Reacting to the reproach that the language of the Bible was characterized by *rusticitas*, Lactantius, like Origen before him, stated that the Bible's *simplicitas* was intended to ensure that God's message would be comprehensible to both cultured and uncultured folk (*Inst.* 5,1,15, CSEL 19,401). In Jerome and Augustine, too, this argumentation can be found, but they go somewhat further. The former (*Epist.* 53,10, CSEL 54,463) adds that the *rusticitas* was partly to be blamed on the first translators of the Bible; cf. Augustine *Doctr. christ.* 2,11,16 (CCSL 32,42). Elsewhere (*Epist.* 53,8, CSEL 54,461) Jerome states that David, the author of the Psalms, is the Christian counterpart of Simonides, Pindar etc. With regard to the *simplicitas* of the Bible, Augustine, in *Catech. rud.* 8,12-9,13 (CCSL 46,133-6), mentions the *admirandae altitudinis saluberrimam humilitatem* (8,12, CCSL 46,133), and says further (8,12, ib. 134) that in the Bible *omnia sanissime dicta sunt*. In his *Doctr. christ.* 4,6,9 ff. (CCSL 32,121 ff.) he illustrates the various rhetorical styles with passages from the Bible.

This new climate was not the outcome of an uninterrupted process.¹⁸ From time to time there were quite significant fluctuations. Thus the attitude of the Christians toward ancient culture was more negative in the second half of the fourth century than in the years immediately following 313; for several reasons there was a renewed tendency to take an explicit stance against pagan culture.¹⁹ In addition, one must reckon with a number of person-

¹⁶ See e.g. Jean-Louis Charlet, "Aesthetic Trends in Late Latin Poetry (325-410)", *Philologus* 132 (1988) 82-5.

¹⁷ See Fuchs 1954 (n. 4) 351-3; Van der Nat 1963 (n. 1) 14 and 28; 1977 (n. 1) 200-201.210.222-3; Hagendahl 1983 (n. 3) 53-4; Herzog 1975 (n. 1) 179-85; Kirsch 1989 (n. 15) 60 ff. and 146-7; further e.g. Costanza 1985 (n. 3) 261-2, n. 19.

¹⁸ Important in this connection Kirsch 1989 (n. 15) 140 ff.

¹⁹ Cf. e.g. Duval 1987 (n. 12) 168-9, n. 11 and Kirsch 1989 (n. 15) 140 ff.

al differences²⁰ and with the variable disposition of certain individuals. Just think of the contradictory positions of Jerome and of the evolution Augustine went through.²¹

On the theoretical level the justification advanced by Lactantius and Hilary of Poitiers of a refined literary prose style is also of fundamental importance for poetry. Their advocacy of *eloquentia* also entailed, in my opinion, the room required by a literary Christian poetry. But, as we shall see below, there is more.

In respect to the following remarks concerning Lactantius I would like to refer expressly to the aforementioned studies by Van der Nat.²² It is a well-known fact that Lactantius justifies the *eloquentia* of his writings by arguing that Christian texts must be cast in a refined style if they are to convince the cultured pagans (thus e.g. *Inst.* 1,1,10, CSEL 19,3; 3,1,1 ff., ib. 177; and 5,1,1 ff., ib. 398 ff.). In 1,1,10, for example, one reads:

Quae (sc. ueritas) licet possit sine eloquentia defendi, ut est a multis saepe defensa, tamen claritate ac nitore sermonis inlustranda et quodammodo adserenda est, ut potentius in animos influat et ui sua instructa et luce orationis ornata.

And although the truth may be defended without eloquence, as it has often been defended by many, it ought to be illustrated and in a certain way asserted by clarity and splendor of speech so that, equipped with its own force as well as adorned by the light of oratory, it may more potently seep into minds. (cf. transl. M.F. McDonald)

In 5,1,14 (CSEL 19,401) he refers in this connection to the justification Lucretius offers for his verses on the doctrine of Epicurus.²³

Less well-known is that Lactantius also created room for Christian poetry by a number of other pronouncements. He shows understanding for the *licentia poetarum*, and counters the traditional reproach that poets bring *mendacia* with the argument that the *officium poetae* consists in the allegorical veiling of the truth (*Inst.* 1,11,24, CSEL 19,40):²⁴

nesciunt enim qui sit poeticae licentiae modus, quousque progredi fingendo liceat, cum officium poetae in eo sit, ut ea quae uere

²⁰ Cf. e.g. Fontaine 1981 (n. 1) 245-6.

²¹ See e.g. Hagendahl 1983 (n. 3) 86 ff.

²² See further, among others, Kirsch 1989 (n. 15) 65-70.

²³ Cf. Van der Nat 1963 (n. 1) 18-19 and 1977 (n. 1) 210 ff. and 219-20; see also Herzog 1989 (n. 1) 380-1, par. 570, and 399, par. 570.

²⁴ See Van der Nat 1963 (n. 1) 18-19.

gesta sunt in alias species obliquis figurationibus cum decore aliquo conuersa traducat.

They do not know what the limits of poetic license are, to what extent it is permissible to proceed in fictionizing, while the poet's function consists in this, that those things which were actually performed he converts with some grace into other appearances by means of figurative language. (cf. transl. M.F. McDonald)

There is further an important declaration concerning *uoluptas*. In chapters 20 ff. of book VI of his *Institutiones* Lactantius pleads *contra uoluptates*, and c. 21 (CSEL 19,562) deals, more specifically, with the *aurium uoluptas*:

(1) Aurium uoluptas ex uocum et cantuum suauitate percipitur, quae scilicet tam uitiosa est quam oblectatio illa de qua diximus oculorum ...

reads the first sentence of the chapter. Lactantius argues, *inter alia*, that music combined with words is even more dangerous than music alone.

(3) Restat unum quod est nobis expugnandum, ne capiamur iis quae ad sensum intimum penetrant. Nam illa omnia quae uerbis carent, id est aeris ac neruorum suaues soni possunt facile contemni, quia non adhaerent nec scribi possunt. (4) Carmen autem compositum et oratio cum suauitate decurrens, capit mentes et quo uoluerit inpellit.

He further specifies that it is the *inimicae ac noxiae uoluptates* that are to be avoided. Thereupon he can posit:

(9) Itaque si uoluptas est audire cantus et carmina, dei laudes canere et audire iucundum sit. (10) Haec est uoluptas uera quae comes est et socia uirtutis ... (ib. 563).

And so if it is a pleasure to hear chants and songs, let it be a joy to hear and sing the praises of God. This is the true pleasure which is the companion and associate of virtue ... (transl. M.F. McDonald)

In other words, there is an acceptable *uoluptas*, i.e. the *uoluptas* coupled with virtue! There is room for *carmina* if they are *laudes dei*.²⁵

²⁵ Cf. Van der Nat 1977 (n. 1) 221 ff. See further on *delectatio* / *dulcedo* as the characteristic feature of poetry, and on an unacceptable and an acceptable *dulcedo*, Costanza 1985 (n. 3) 259-60 n. 15; see also Wolfgang Kirsch, "Die Umstrukturierung des lateinischen Literatursystems im Zeichen der Krise des 3. Jahrhunderts", *Philologus* 132 (1988) 11, and further below, p. 54-5. In his *Epist.* 16,7 (CSEL 29,121) Paulinus of Nola speaks of the *perniciosa dulcedo litterarum*; on which see W. Erdt, *Christentum und heidnisch-antike Bildung bei Paulin von Nola (mit Kommentar und Uebersetzung des 16. Briefes)* (Meisenheim am

In line with the classical aesthetic notion of *decorum* Hilary, for his part, justifies a refined literary style for Christian writings by pointing to the dignity of the subject-matter to be dealt with (*In psalm. 13,1* [CSEL 22,78-9]):

In multis nos erudiens apostolus etiam id edocet, cum omni reuerentia uerbum dei esse tractandum, dicens "qui loquitur, tamquam eloquia dei" (1 Pet. 4,11). Non enim secundum sermonis nostri usum promiscuam in his esse oportet facilitatem; sed loquentibus nobis ea, quae didicimus et legimus, per sollicitudinem sermonandi honor est reddendus auctori. Et exemplum nobis caelestis doctrinae praestat humani officii consuetudo. Si enim quis uerba regis interpretans et praecepta eius in aurem populi deducens curat diligenter et caute per officii reuerentiam regis satisfacere dignitati, ut cum honore ac religione omnia et relegantur et audiantur: quanto magis conuenit dei eloquia ad cognitionem humanam retractantes dignos nos hoc officio praestare? Sumus enim quoddam sancti spiritus organum, per quod uocis uarietas et doctrinae diuersitas audienda est. Vigilandum ergo et curandum est, ut nihil humile dicamus metuentes huius sententiae legem: "Maledictus omnis faciens opera dei negligenter" (Jer. 48,10).

The Christian message which the bishop brings in the name of God requires a dignified phrasing: what holds for someone who must convey a message from the emperor to the people, holds *a fortiori* for someone who must propagate God's word to man.²⁶ Thus he also implicitly justifies a Christian poetry: indeed, verse can lend a text a higher dignity.

Further, I would like to point to the considerable number of quotations from classical poets that can be found in the prose works of Lactantius,²⁷ who, for that matter, calls Virgil *poeta noster*.²⁸ Reinhart Herzog has shown, in my opinion convincingly, that the way Lactantius cites the classical poets illustrates a cli-

Glan 1976) 183 ff., esp. 188. See on *delectatio* further Franz Quadlbauer, "Zur 'invocatio' des Juvenecus (*praef.* 5-27)", *Grazer Beiträge* 2 (1974) 205 and Jacques Fontaine, *Études sur la poésie latine tardive d'Ausone à Prudence* (Paris 1980) 101.

²⁶ See on this passage in Hilary, Jacques Fontaine, "L'apport d'Hilaire de Poitiers à une théorie chrétienne de l'esthétique du style (Remarques sur 'In psalm. 13, 1')", in *Hilaire et son temps (Actes du colloque de Poitiers, 29 sept. — 3 oct. 1968, à l'occasion du XVIe centenaire de la mort de Saint Hilaire)* (Paris 1969) 287-305.

²⁷ See e.g. E. Messmer, *Laktanz und die Dichtung* (München 1974) and A. Goulon, "Les citations des poètes latins dans l'œuvre de Lactance", in *Lactance et son temps. Recherches actuelles (Actes du IVe colloque d'études historiques et patristiques, Chantilly 21-23 sept. 1976)* ed. J. Fontaine—M. Perrin (Paris 1978) 107-56.

²⁸ See Eberhard Heck, "*Vestrum est—poeta noster*. Von der Geringschätzung Vergils zu seiner Aneignung in der frühchristlichen lateinischen Apologetik", *MH* 47 (1990) 102-20.

mate in which a Christian poetry in the language of those classical poets could originate; classical Christian poetry commences at the point reached by Lactantius' *imitatio* of the classical poets.²⁹

It cannot be coincidental that both Lactantius and Hilary of Poitiers also wrote Christian poetry. The former is almost certainly the author of the crypto-Christian poem *De aue Phoenix*, the beginning of classical Christian poetry;³⁰ the latter is the writer of the first liturgical hymns composed in accordance with the rules of the classical tradition.

2.3. *The Christian poets' justification of their poetic activities*

Such an altered climate, then, made the birth of a classical Christian poetry possible. There arose a desire to compose, starting from the particular Christian situation, a specifically Christian poetry in keeping with the principles of classical poetry. But that poetry could not simply be taken for granted. Reservations against poetry as literature remained, and Juvenius and the other Christian poets who wrote verses not directly meant for ecclesiastical use felt obliged to justify their poetic activities.³¹ In such statements a number of motifs constantly return. In time this argumentation, which, to a degree, constitutes a Christian actualization of classical *topoi*, was to form in its turn an obligatory topic that no longer had anything to do with real reservations against a classical Christian poetry.

²⁹ 1975 (n. 1) 185 ff., with, e.g. 185: "Der Ort der Poesie in der älteren christlichen Literatur ist die Klassikerimitation".

³⁰ See Fontaine 1981 (n. 1) 53-66 and Herzog 1989 (n. 1) 398-401.

³¹ On the poetics of the early Christian poets, I will confine myself to a few useful and recent titles. On Juvenius: P.G. van der Nat, "Die Praefatio der Evangelienparaphrase des Juvenius", in *Romanitas et Christianitas. Studia J. H. Waszink ... oblata*, ed. W. den Boer et alii (Amsterdam—London 1973) 249 ff.; Herzog 1975 (n. 1) XLV-XLIX; Costanza 1985 (n. 3) 253-86; Kirsch 1989 (n. 15) 85-92. On Proba: Herzog 1975 (n. 1) XLIX-LI. On Paulinus of Nola: Salvatore Costanza, "La poetica di Paolino da Nola", in *Studi classici in onore di Q. Cataudella* (Catania 1972) 3, 593-613; Helena Junod-Ammerbauer, "Le poète chrétien selon Paulin de Nole", *REAug* 21 (1975) 13-54; and Erdt 1976 (n. 25). On Prudentius: Isidoro Rodríguez-Herrera, *Poeta christianus. Prudentius' Auffassung vom Wesen und von der Aufgabe des christlichen Dichters* (Speyer 1936); Italo Lana, *Due capitoli prudentiani. La biografia, la cronologia delle opere, la poetica* (Roma 1962); Klaus Thraede, *Studien zu Sprache und Stil des Prudentius* (Göttingen 1965); Salvatore Costanza, "Le concezioni poetiche di Prudenzio e il carme XVIII di Paolino di Nola", *Siculorum Gymnasium* N.S. 29 (1976) 123-49; Kirsch 1989 (n. 15) 238-44. On Sedulius: Herzog 1975 (n. 1) LII-LIV; Costanza 1985 (n. 3) 253-86; Michael Roberts, *Biblical Epic and Rhetorical Paraphrase in Late Antiquity* (Liverpool 1985) 76-86.

The relevant motifs are presented clearly by Paul Klopsch.³² I will confine myself here to a brief survey of what is relevant to my present subject.

– From Juvenicus on, the truth of what the Christian poet writes is opposed to the lies of pagan poetry. The Christian author defends himself by saying: what I write may be poetry, but it is true. Telling in this respect is e.g. Paulinus of Nola *Carm.* 20,28-30 (CSEL 30,144):

non adficta canam, licet arte poematis utar.
Historica narrabo fide sine fraude poetae;
absit enim famulo Christi mentita profari.

Though I use the poet's art, the song I sing will not be invented. I shall tell it with an historian's truthfulness and without the poet's deceit, because a servant of Christ should not utter lies. (cf. transl. P.G. Walsh)

– In connection with the previous motif the Christian poet points to the divine inspiration of his verses. In particular he refers to Christ or the Holy Spirit; a saint, too, can be mentioned as source of inspiration. Such sources are opposed to those of the pagan poets, viz. Apollo and the Muses. Thus we read in Juvenicus *Praef.* 25-6 (CSEL 24,2):

Sanctificus adsit mihi carminis auctor
spiritus.

And in Paulinus *Carm.* 15,30-3 (CSEL 30,52):

Non ego Castalidas, uatum phantasmata, Musas
nec surdum Aonia Phoebum de rupe ciebo;
carminis incentor Christus mihi, munere Christi
audeo peccator sanctum et caelestia fari.

I shall not summon Castalian Muses, the ghosts of poets, nor rouse deaf Phoebus from the Aonian rock. Christ will inspire my song, for it is through Christ's gift that I, a sinner, dare to tell of His saint and heavenly things. (transl. P.G. Walsh)

The poet can thereby label himself either as a musical instrument that is being played by God,³³ or as a canal through which God's mercy flows to his readers.³⁴

³² 1980 (n. 1) 3 ff.

³³ See e.g. Jacques Fontaine, "Les symbolismes de la cithare dans la poésie de Paulin de Nole", in *Romanitas et christianitas. Studia J. H. Waszink .. oblata*, ed. W. den Boer et alii (Amsterdam—London 1973) 123-43.

³⁴ See e.g. Herzog 1975 (n. 1) LI, n. 158 on the Christianization of the traditional *fons Musarum*; further Costanza 1985 (n. 3) 280-1, n. 64 (the Jordan river).

– The Christian poet further expresses the hope that his verses will please God and safeguard him from punishment in hell. Juvenecus already expresses himself in this sense (*Praef.* 22, CSEL 24,2): *hoc etenim forsan me subtrahet igni*. After him, quite emphatically, Prudentius *Praef.* and *Epil.*

– In the same spirit the Christian poet calls his verses, and poetic art in general, an offering to God. I would refer here to Prudentius *Epil.*³⁵ In Paulinus of Nola, Prudentius, Sedulius, and Ennodius one encounters the consideration that man, gifted with a voice, can do no better, in view of his salvation, than to sing the praises of his Creator.³⁶ Thus we read in Prudentius *Cath.* 3,31-5 (CSEL 61,14):

Quod generosa potest anima,
lucis et aetheris indigena,
soluere dignius obsequium,
quam data munera si recinat
artificem modulata suum?

What worthier service can the high-born soul, native of light and heaven, pay, than to chant the gifts she has received, singing of her Creator? (transl. H.J. Thomson)

Compare also Paulinus of Nola *Carm.* 10,29-32 (CSEL 30,25):

Nunc alia mentem uis agit, maior deus,
aliosque mores postulat,
sibi reposcens ab homine munus suum,
uiuamus ut uitae patri.

Compare also Ennodius *Carm.* 1,9, *Praef.* 4 (ed. F. Vogel, p. 41).

– The Christian poet further legitimates his activity by referring to the example of the biblical poet David. Thus already Hilary: in the two verses with which he commences his *Liber hymnorum* (ed. W. Bulst, p. 31), he celebrates David as the creator of the hymn to Christ:

Felix propheta Dauid primus organi
in carne Christum hymnis mundo nuntians.

After him Paulinus of Nola *Carm.* 6,13-26 (CSEL 30,8), etc.

³⁵ Christian Gnllka, "Interpretation frühchristlicher Literatur dargestellt am Beispiel des Prudentius", in *Impulse für die lateinische Lektüre. Von Terenz bis Thomas Morus* ed. H. Krefeld (Frankfurt am Main 1979) 160 speaks of "eine neuartige Bindung zwischen Gott, dem Dichter, seinem Thema und seinem Publikum".

³⁶ Cf. Costanza 1985 (n. 15) 268.

Telling is Ps.-Paulinus *Carm.* 32 (the so-called *carmen ultimum*) 5-8 (CSEL 30,330):

et ne displiceat quod talia carmina pango,
David ipse deum modulata uoce rogauit,
quo nos exemplo pro magnis parua canemus,
dicentes quae sunt fugienda sequenda colenda.³⁷

Do not be offended at my composing a work of this nature, for David himself prayed to God in words set to music. I shall follow his example, and sing my song; mine will be slight by comparison with his. I shall tell what we must avoid, and what we must pursue and cultivate. (transl. P.G. Walsh)

– Sedulius, in the letter *Ad Macedonium*³⁸ with which he introduces his *Carmen Paschale*, adds some further arguments: he refers first of all to the fact that little Christian poetry is yet available, just when the preference of many readers is attuned to verse. He also voices his conviction that because of this preference verses are more easily memorized by such readers and that therefore they are better suited to impressing the Christian faith. Finally, he adds that he wishes to accommodate the innate preference of the readers. Sedulius thus writes (CSEL 10,4-6):

Cur autem metrica uoluerim haec ratione componere, non differam breuiter expedire. Raro, pater optime, sicut uestra quoque peritia lectionis adsiduitate cognoscit, diuinae munera potestatis stilo quisquam huius modulationis aptauit, et multi sunt quos studiorum saecularium disciplina per poeticas magis delicias et carminum uoluptates oblectat. Hi quicquid rhetoricae facundiae perlegunt, neglegentius adsequuntur, quoniam illud haud diligunt: quod autem uersuum uiderint blandimento mellitum, tanta cordis auditate suscipiunt, ut in alta memoria saepius haec iterando constituent et reponant. Horum itaque mores non repudiandos aestimo sed pro insita consuetudine uel natura tractandos, ut quisque suo magis ingenio uoluntarius adquiratur deo. Nec differt qua quis occasione inbuatur ad fidem, dum tamen uiam libertatis ingressus non repetat iniquae seruitutis laqueos, quibus ante fuerat inretitus.

– Another argument that poets could adduce to justify the (use of) verse form I have not yet encountered in explicit terms. In line with what Hilary of Poitiers wrote in justification of a refined literary form for a Christian text in general, poets could argue that poetical form, and specifically the *uersus heroicus*, made it

³⁷ See further J. Daniélou, "David", *RAC* 3 (1957) 598.

³⁸ Cf. Herzog 1975 (n. 1) LII-LIII.

possible to sing the praises of God in a more exalted fashion. The epilogue of Juvencus' biblical epic probably contains this argument in 4,802-5 (CSEL 24,145-6):

Has mea mens fidei uires sanctique timoris
cepit et in tantum lucet mihi gratia Christi
uersibus ut nostris diuinae gloria legis
ornamenta libens caperet terrestria linguae.³⁹

My mind had received such strength of faith and reverent fear and the grace of Christ shone on me so strongly that in my verses the glory of the holy law readily received the earthly adornments of language. (cf. transl. M. Roberts)

Besides all these words of justification to which the Christian poets felt compelled, the following two facts could also be a result of the unacknowledged position of literary Christian poetry although their interpretation is (rather) uncertain. First of all, it is highly probable that none of the surviving *carmina* of Paulinus of Nola postdate his consecration as bishop. In addition, there is the fact that Sedulius wrote his *Opus Paschale* after his *Carmen Paschale*; according to the introductory letter *Ad Macedonium* accompanying the *Opus* his *Carmen* would have elicited some criticism⁴⁰ and the author himself concedes that certain points could not be treated *pro metricae necessitatis angustia* (CSEL 10,171).⁴¹

2.4. The functions of literary Christian poetry

For which purposes did Christians write 'literary' Christian verse? And which functions did early Christian literary poetry actually fulfil?

³⁹ Cf. Van der Nat 1973 (n. 31) 254-5; Herzog 1975 (n. 1) XLVI and 1989 (n. 1) 334; Roberts 1985 (n. 31) 69-70.

⁴⁰ Herzog 1975 (n. 1) XLI, speaks of "die einschneidendste spätantike Reaktion auf Bibeldichtung".

⁴¹ Whether the absence of *carmina* from the period following Paulinus' consecration as bishop has anything to do with his new position is uncertain. P.G. Walsh, *The Poems of St. Paulinus of Nola, translated and annotated* (Ancient Christian Writers 40; New York 1975) 3, suggests that contemporary circumstances may have been the reason why Paulinus produced no more *carmina* after 409; to which it may also be added that few letters of Paulinus have survived from that period (after 408-409). See also Duval 1987 (n. 12) 188 n. 92. Whether the criticism mentioned by Sedulius was real or just a fiction he himself adduced to justify a variant version of his *Carmen Paschale* is uncertain. See e.g. Judith McClure, "The Biblical Epic and its Audience in Late Antiquity", *Papers of the Liverpool Latin Seminar* 3 (1981) 311, and Roberts 1985 (n. 31) 79-84.

The 'literary' early Christian poets in my opinion composed verses in the first place because they liked to do so and/or had an audience in mind that was keen on poetry. On the other hand, none of the Christian poets of the fourth or first half of the fifth century wrote Christian poetry merely instead of profane verse or intended his Christian poems merely as literary entertainment for aristocratic circles.⁴² The Christian message, in the period under discussion here, was for them, with few exceptions, a matter of conviction.⁴³ Juvencus' undertaking was connected with the aversion that the language of the *Veteres Latinae* evoked among cultivated Romans and it fits in with the attempts made after 313 to win converts among cultured pagans and to fulfil the cultural needs of the already converted.⁴⁴ Jacques Fontaine calls Juvencus' poetry "une communication plus aisée entre un public cultivé et l'Écriture".⁴⁵ Yves-Marie Duval formulates the aim of the Christian poets as follows: "Gagner l'aristocratie et, pour ce faire, lui parler son langage au moins autant que celui de l'Évangile."⁴⁶ The priest Juvencus, and other Christian poets after him, wanted to please and to edify ("erbauen", "édifier") with their (Christian) verses; in particular, in the words of Reinhart Herzog,⁴⁷ they wished to satisfy the "Andachtsbedürfnis" (devotional needs) of the cultivated Christians, who liked to link pious contemplation with the pleasures of poetry. The priest and future

⁴² Cf. McClure 1981 (n. 41) 311.

⁴³ By "exceptions" I mean such poems as Ausonius' *Versus Paschales* and Claudian's *De Salvatore*. In both cases we would seem to be dealing with a form of official poetry destined for the imperial court. Ausonius was a Christian who believed that poetry did not need to be christianized, while Claudian was a pagan. See on these poems Jean-Louis Charlet, "Théologie, politique et rhétorique. La célébration poétique de Pâques à la cour de Valentinien et d'Honorius, d'après Ausone (*Versus Paschales*) et Claudien (*De Salvatore*)", in *La poesia tardoantica. Tra retorica, teologia et politica* (Messina 1984) 259-87.

⁴⁴ Kirsch 1989 (n. 15) 70-2 situates Juvencus, together with Eusebius and Lactantius, in the new atmosphere that arose around Constantine the Great.

⁴⁵ 1981 (n. 1) 153; cf. 144 and 157-8. McClure 1981 (n. 41) 308 in my view rightly emphasizes that the biblical epics were not intended as an alternative to the Bible itself. Herzog 1975 (n. 1) 179 ff. would seem to see things differently; on p. 182 he speaks of what he calls the "literarische Offenheit der Bibel"; according to him the books of the Bible, in the eyes of early Christians, stood outside literature; they would have believed or at least accepted that other forms of 'translating' the Bible were possible besides the *Veteres Latinae*, and on p. 211 he calls Juvencus a "Bibelübersetzer". The latter is in any event a distortion of reality. See Fontaine 1981 (n. 1) 70-1, on the fact that Jerome, a 'professional' translator, employs different terms to indicate Juvencus' Bible paraphrase and true translation work.

⁴⁶ 1987 (n. 12) 186.

⁴⁷ 1975 (n. 1) *passim*.

bishop Paulinus of Nola as well as the layman Prudentius, as Jacques Fontaine has convincingly shown,⁴⁸ plainly coupled, after their second conversion, their desire to versify with their ascetic Christian attitude. Fontaine speaks of “des lettrés épris d’ascétisme”.⁴⁹ In my view, one could equally speak of “des ascètes épris de littérature”. Yet there is a clear difference between the two poets. Paulinus is much more reserved towards pagan culture.⁵⁰ Prudentius, on the other hand, is undeniably, and in more than one respect, interested in linking *Christianitas* and *Romanitas*. To a certain extent he shares with the pagans of Symmachus’ circle the same cultural ethos: upholding the Roman cultural tradition.⁵¹ Already at an early stage cultured Christians must have felt the need to build up a cultural counterpart to the impressive pagan tradition. From a certain moment the intention to create a pluriform Christian literature played a role.⁵² The aim was to produce poetry that could compare in literary quality with classical verse and would surpass it by its Christian content (*Kontrastprogramm; Konkurrenzprodukte; reformatio in melius*).⁵³ This aspiration was undoubtedly already present at an early stage, since soon after 313 the Christians were no longer content to simply pass on the Christian message but also wanted to create a Christian culture. Significant in this respect is Jerome’s history of Christian literature, his *De uiris illustribus*. Whether it was intended to provide, after Julian’s decree forbidding Christians to comment on (pagan) authors in the schools, a Christian alternative to pagan school literature is quite uncertain.⁵⁴ Later, Christian poets—especially Juvenius, Prudentius, Sedulius and Arator—were adopted in the schools alongside classical pagan writers, and excerpts

⁴⁸ 1981 (n. 1) 143 ff.

⁴⁹ 1981 (n. 1) 180.

⁵⁰ See Erdt 1976 (n. 25).

⁵¹ Cf. Duval 1987 (n. 12) 169-73.

⁵² Cf. Van der Nat 1963 (n. 1) 20 and 25.

⁵³ Cf. Charlet 1988 (n. 16) 82-5.

⁵⁴ On this see e.g. Klopsch 1980 (n. 1) 3 n. 1, and 17 n. 20; Van der Nat 1963 (n. 1) 24-5 speaks in this connection of a dubious tradition. Cf. also Thraede 1965 (n. 31) 22. The school perspective indicated in Marius Victorius, *Alethia, precatio*, v. 104, he terms a fiction; cf. id., “Epos”, *RAC* 5 (1962) 983-1042, esp. 1028. The Christians seem to have thought only exceptionally, or not at all, about replacing pagan literature by a Christian counterpart. See e.g. Gnifka 1979 (n. 35) 148. In the handbook of M. Schanz—C. Hosius, *Geschichte der römischen Literatur bis zum Gesetzgebungswerk des Kaisers Justinian IV* 1 (München 1914²) 209, for instance, mention is still made of Juvenius’ intention to “supplant” the epos of old.

from the literary hymns of Prudentius even ended up in the liturgy!⁵⁵

2.5. *Liturgical and epigraphical poetry in accordance with classical standards*

Only after several cultured Christians, for a variety of reasons, had ventured to treat Christian and biblical topics in the controversial classical poetic forms, did these traditional forms penetrate into the heart of the Church, i.e. the liturgy.⁵⁶ A first initiative in this sense, the hymns of bishop Hilary of Poitiers, do not really merit the predicate 'successful'. Hilary sought his inspiration in what he had heard and seen during his banishment in the East. But the content of his verses was too difficult, and their form too complicated, to render them easily useful to the liturgy. A statement by Jerome (*In Gal.* 2, *initium*, PL 26,355) makes it clear that the faithful of Poitiers were not particularly enthusiastic. Much more successful were the verses of bishop Ambrose of Milan. Like Hilary he wanted to give his parishioners a voice in the battle against the Arians. Their hymns, in the words of Fontaine, formed "une arme de défense du peuple chrétien contre la propagation de l'hérésie", "un instrument efficace de propagande doctrinale".⁵⁷

In the West, as in the East, the initiative, originating in the second century, presumably lay with the 'heretics'. At any rate, they were less inhibited than the cautious 'catholics'.⁵⁸ I cite here just a single testimonium: Augustine, in *Epist.* 55,18,34 (CSEL 34,1, 209) speaks of psalms written by Donatists and of their reproach that catholics confined themselves to psalms from the Bible.

It may be mentioned here in passing that the *carmina natalicia* which Paulinus, priest, and later bishop, of Nola, composed annually on the occasion of the feast-day of St. Felix of Nola were actually declaimed in the local church. They have been called "hexametrische Festpredigten"⁵⁹ and also characterized as an instrument of ideological influencing;⁶⁰ on the other hand, the

⁵⁵ See e.g. Klopsch 1980 (n. 1) 3 and 18-19.

⁵⁶ Cf. Fontaine 1981 (n. 1) 88. Otherwise Klopsch 1980 (n. 1) 2; he finds it remarkable that classical non-liturgical poetry precedes classical liturgical verse.

⁵⁷ 1981 (n. 1) 82 and 227.

⁵⁸ See in particular Klaus Thraede, "Untersuchungen zum Ursprung und zur Geschichte der christlichen Poesie, I", *JbAC* 4 (1961) 108-110 and further Van der Nat 1963 (n. 1) 8; Fontaine 1981 (n. 1) 81; Duval 1987 (n. 12) 179.

⁵⁹ Wolfgang Kirsch, "Die spätantike Gesellschaft und die Literatur", *Philologus* 133 (1989) 139.

⁶⁰ Id., "Die Natalicia des Paulinus von Nola als Mittel ideologischer Beeinflussung", *Klio* 65 (1983) 331-6.

question has been raised to what extent the people of Nola would have been capable of understanding the poems in such a form.⁶¹ In 544 the subdeacon Arator recited his epic paraphrase of the *Acta Apostolorum* in the church of *S. Petri ad uincula* in Rome,⁶² and by his glorification of the apostles Peter and Paul upheld the position of the bishop of Rome: he was regularly interrupted by applause.⁶³

Apart from the liturgy, classical poetic forms also played a role in other ways in churches or in other *loca sancta*, in particular in the guise of epitaphs and other inscriptions (e.g. in *baptisteria*). Here may be mentioned more specifically the inscriptions that Pope Damasus composed for the martyrs' graves in Rome, as well as various verses by the bishops Ambrose and Sidonius Apollinaris and by the future bishop Paulinus of Nola. The metrical *tituli* by Pope Damasus, like some of Ambrose's hymns, served to propagate the cult of the martyrs. The layman Prudentius offers, with his *Dittochaëum*, a literary variant of the genre of metrical captions to biblical frescoes.⁶⁴

2.6. Church Fathers and official ecclesiastical documents on Christian poetry

In comparison with prose, poetry occupied a very restricted place within early Christianity.⁶⁵ It should therefore cause no surprise that, apart from the writings of the Christian poets themselves, there are relatively few remarks to be found on early Christian poetry.⁶⁶

In *Epist.* 75A (his *Sermo contra Auxentium de basilicis tradendis*), 34 (CSEL 82,105) Ambrose speaks of the Arian reaction to the success of his (anti-Arian) hymns; in this connection he also points out the value of liturgical chant:

Hymnorum quoque meorum carminibus deceptum populum ferunt, plane nec hoc abnuo. Grande carmen istud est quo nihil potentius; quid enim potentius quam confessio trinitatis, quae cottidie totius populi ore celebratur? Certatim omnes student

⁶¹ E.g. Kirsch 1988 (n. 25) 13 and 15. Cf. also Walsh 1975 (n. 41) 12 on the public for which Paulinus' *natalicia* were destined.

⁶² See Fontaine 1981 (n. 1) 265.

⁶³ Herzog 1975 (n. 1) XLII.

⁶⁴ Cf. Duval 1987 (n. 12) 187.

⁶⁵ Cf. e.g. Kirsch 1988 (n. 25) 17.

⁶⁶ In my view, behind the title "Christliche Dichtung kein Problem" which occurs on p. 37 of Klopsch 1980 (n. 1) lurks an erroneous interpretation of the comparative silence of the Church Fathers.

fidem fateri, patrem et filium et spiritum sanctum norunt uersibus praedicare. Facti sunt igitur omnes magistri, qui uix poterant esse discipuli.

They declare also that the people have been beguiled by the strains of my hymns. I certainly do not deny it. That is a lofty strain, and there is nothing more powerful than it. For what has more power than the confession of the Trinity which is daily celebrated by the mouth of the whole people? All eagerly vie one with the other in confessing the faith, and know how to praise in verse the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. So they all have become teachers, who scarcely could be disciples. (cf. transl. H. De Romestin)

Within the framework of his commentary on the Psalms the same bishop offers some interesting considerations on the value of psalmodizing in church.⁶⁷ Here *Explanatio psalmi* 1,9 (CSEL 64,7) may be cited:

Psalmus enim benedictio populi est, dei laus, plebis laudatio, plausus omnium, sermo uniuersorum, uox ecclesiae, fidei canora confessio, auctoritatis plena deuotio, libertatis laetitia, clamor iocunditatis, laetitiae resultatio. Ab iracundia mitigat, a sollicitudine abdicat, a maerore alleuat ...

Compare this with what Augustine writes in *Conf.* 9,7,15 (ed. M. Skutella, p. 191-2). In a well-known passage from the same book of his *Confessiones* (viz. 9,12,32, ib. p. 205-6) Augustine professes that the Ambrosian hymn can also play a role outside liturgical celebration, when a believer ponders the text of the hymn.

Nicetas of Remesiana, who wrote his *De psalmodiae bono* (*De utilitate hymnorum*) in reaction to those in East and West that rejected chant in the liturgy,⁶⁸ praises the Psalms and is convinced that the *dulcedo* of the chant ensures that even the recalcitrant absorb God's word; thus he writes (5) *et quasi cum delectatione eloquia diuina susciperent*, and further (sc. *psalmus*) *penetrat animum dum delectat, facile retinetur dum frequentius psallitur* (PL Supplementum 3,193).

What Ambrose and Nicetas of Remesiana write about the Psalms must in their eyes have applied equally to the new liturgical hymns.

In writings on Christian education like Augustine's *De doctrina christiana* or Cassiodorus' *Institutiones* early Christian poetry, not being a point of discussion, is virtually absent.

The question can be asked to what extent Augustine theoretic-

⁶⁷ See Fontaine 1981 (n. 1) 131 ff.

⁶⁸ Cf. Augustine *Epist.* 55,18,34 (CSEL 34,2,208-9).

cally leaves room, in his *De doctrina christiana* (dating from the period 396/7—426), for 'literary' poetic activity by Christians. Typical is the pronouncement in 2,7,10 (CCSL 32,37): One should shy away *ab omni mortifera iucunditate rerum transeuntium* ("from every deadly pleasure of passing things") and orient oneself *ad dilectionem aeternorum* ("toward the love of eternal things"). In 2,31,48 (ib. 66) Augustine turns against language *abundantius quam gravitatem decet uerborum ornamenta consecretans* ("that strives after verbal embellishments in more abundance than is suitable for seriousness" [transl. J.J. Gavigan]). In book 4, however, he does advocate a Christian *eloquentia*, which is defensible if of course it serves the truth (4,6,10, ib. 122-3; cf. 2,36,54, ib. p. 70). Even the pursuit of *delectatio* is allowed, but only if it is unambiguously subordinated to *docere* and *mouere* (4,13,29, ib. 136-7); *delectatio* can be useful to retain the attention (4,12,27, ib. 135). *Eloquentiae ostentatio*, however, is always bad. With regard to *clausulae* the bishop writes in 4,20,41 (ib. 148): *Sed cauendum est, ne diuinis grauibusque sententiis, dum additur numerus, pondus detrahatur*. Augustine even fears that the *homines graues* will non appreciate his being preoccupied with matters of form (4,7,14, ib. 127). "St. Augustin voyait dans la recherche exagérée de la forme et de l'élégance du langage un souci qui détournait l'âme des réalités de la vie chrétienne ... Il repousse vivement l'idée de la beauté littéraire cultivée pour elle-même", thus G. Combès and J. Farges, the editors of *De doctrina christiana* in the *Bibliothèque Augustinienne*.⁶⁹ All this in my view leads to the conclusion that in the eyes of Augustine literary poetry presumably implies too much attention to formal beauty and is therefore undesirable.

In the discussion Augustine had in 386-387 at Cassiciacum with the poet Licentius (see *De ordine* 1,6-24, CCSL 29,91-101) there was still more room for literary poetry. And in *Epist.* 26,5 from 395 (CSEL 34,1,88) he called upon that same poet to follow the example of the poet Paulinus of Nola:

Vade, disce, quibus opibus ingenii sacrificia laudis ei offerat refundens illi, quicquid boni accepit ex illo, ne amittat omnia, si non in eo reponat, a quo haec habet.

⁶⁹ *Œuvres de Saint Augustin*, vol. II. *De catechizandis rudibus. De doctrina christiana* (...) (Paris 1949) 551 and 593. See further on *delectatio* in the eyes of Augustine Reinhart Herzog, "Exegese—Erbauung—Delectatio. Beiträge zu einer christlichen Poetik der Spätantike", in *Formen und Funktionen der Allegorie* ed. W. Haug (Stuttgart 1979) 52-69.

Go, learn with what wealth of genius he offers a sacrifice of praise, returning to Him whatever good he has received, lest he lose all if he did not return all to its source. (cf. transl. W. Parsons)

According to Augustine, Licentius is too attached to worldly things, to *iucunditas falsa* and *incerta uoluptas* (2, ib. p. 85). He must put his *ingenium* at the service of God (4, ib. p. 87):

Da domino meo te, qui omnium nostrum dominus est, qui tibi illud donauit ingenium.⁷⁰

For that matter, Augustine is more interested in Licentius' way of life than in poetry!

With regard to the evolution Augustine went through I would like to recall that once he had become a priest he hardly had a good word to say of such poets as Virgil about whom he had spoken before in a positive sense. "Der 'poeta noster' der Cassiciacumzeit (c. acad. 3,4,9) wird nachher mit markierter Distanz zum 'poeta vester' oder 'illorum poeta'."⁷¹

Cassiodorus in his *Institutiones* now and then quotes Virgil, and once Sedulius, but does not speak of poetry aside from the Psalms.⁷²

Even Jerome, who was eager to demonstrate that the Christians were developing an extensive and decent literary activity, can hardly be called a propagandist of Christian poetry. In his *De uiris illustribus*, as in the homonymous work by Gennadius, the Christian poets receive no special attention.⁷³ From a passage in a letter *Ad Magnum* (70,5,3, CSEL 54,77-8) it does become clear that Jerome regarded Juvenius' biblical epic as a daring initiative, and once a particularly apt formulation of Juvenius is cited with appreciation (*In Matth.* 1,2,11, CCSL 77,13):

Pulcherrime munus sacramenta Iuuenius presbiter uno uersiculo comprehendit:

⁷⁰ See further e.g. D. Romano, "Licenzio poeta. Sulla posizione di Agostino verso la poesia", *Nuovo Didaskaleion* 11 (1962) 1-22.

⁷¹ Thus Hagendahl 1983 (n. 3) 76.

⁷² See *An Introduction to Divine and Human Readings by Cassiodorus Senator, translated with an introduction and notes by Leslie Webber Jones* (New York 1946) 26-7. See further on Cassiodorus' evaluation of the profane *artes* Hermann Funke, "Kirche und Literatur am Uebergang von der Spätantike zum Mittelalter", *Klio* 64 (1982) 459-65. In his *Expositio psalmorum* too Cassiodorus quotes Sedulius a few times; see CCSL 98, *Index scriptorum*, 1360, and McClure 1981 (n. 41) 313. Herzog 1975 (n. 1) XLII, speaks, in connection with *Exp. in Ps.* 113,12, of a "bewundernde Anführung".

⁷³ See e.g. Klopsch 1980 (n. 1) 37.

Thus aurum murram regique hominique deoque
dona ferunt.

Yet Jerome's Bible commentaries contain quite a few quotations from classical poetry. Apart from literary histories and the (spurious) *Decretum Gelasianum* one finds, besides these mentions of Juvencus, no other (positive) references to Christian biblical epics before Cassiodorus.⁷⁴ Judith McClure attributes the initial rejection of Juvencus to the *diatessaron*-formula of his *Euangeliorum libri* and to the fact that the technique of paraphrasing did indeed involve some loss of content.⁷⁵ By stating in his *Prol. in Iob* (*Biblia sacra* ed. R. Weber, vol. 1, p. 731-2) that certain parts of the Book of Job were metrical (cf. also *Epist.* 53,8, CSEL 54,455, and Augustine *Doctr.* 4,20,41, CCSL 32,148), and by writing in his *Epist.* 53,8 (CSEL 54,461) *David Simonides noster, Pindarus et Alcaeus, Flaccus quoque, Catullus et Serenus, Christum lyra personat et in decacordo psalterio ab inferis excitat resurgentem*, Jerome supported one of the arguments wielded by the Christian poets to justify their poetic activities. But as to Proba's Christian *cento* Jerome, as is well-known, had nothing good to say (*Epist.* 53,7, CSEL 54,453-4).⁷⁶

It may also be pointed out in this connection that it took a conspicuously long time before any mention is made of Prudentius, the greatest Christian poet of Antiquity.⁷⁷

In official ecclesiastical documents and monastic rules the new liturgical hymns are mentioned a few times. The abuse that heretics made of hymns, from the second century on, to propagate their errant doctrines evoked in some catholics the reactive tendency to ban all non-biblical chant from the church. Non-biblical chants were thus barred from the liturgy by the Council of Laodicea, which took place between 343 and 381, and also by the Council of Braga in 563! The tendency in favour, however, was stronger. And yet the fourth Council of Toledo in 633 still found

⁷⁴ See Herzog 1975 (n. 1) 52.

⁷⁵ 1981 (n. 41) 313-4.

⁷⁶ See further on Jerome R. Eiswirth, *Hieronymus' Stellung zur Literatur und Kunst* (Wiesbaden 1955), and, in particular in connection with our topic here, J.-M. Poinssotte, "Jérôme et la poésie latine chrétienne", in *Jérôme entre l'Occident et l'Orient. XVIe centenaire du départ de Saint Jérôme de Rome et de son installation à Bethléem* (Actes du Colloque de Chantilly, sept. 1986) ed. Y.-M. Duval (Paris 1988) 295-303.

⁷⁷ See the introduction to the Prudentius edition of M. Lavarenne in the *Collection des Universités de France*; Herzog 1979 (n. 69) 56 draws attention to the fact that Prudentius is not mentioned by Augustine. Van der Nat 1977 (n. 1) 214 points to the initial ignoring of the Christian poets.

it necessary, in keeping with the positive pronouncements of previous councils, to explicitly recommend the use of non-biblical hymns in church. At any rate, in the West they were incorporated into ecclesiastical services and offices less easily and to a lesser degree than in the East. Rome in particular was to wait quite a while before adopting them into the liturgy—according to the *Liturgisch Woordenboek* this did not happen until the twelfth/thirteenth century.⁷⁸

In the (spurious) *Decretum Gelasianum* (sixth century) (TU 38,4, p. 10) Juvencus' and Sedulius' biblical epics are mentioned among the *libri recipiendi*:

Item uenerabilis uiri Sedulii opus paschale, quod heroicis descripsit uersibus, insigni laude praeferimus. Item Iuueni nihilominus laboriosum opus non spernimus sed miramur.

The *cento* of Proba and the verses of Commodianus are mentioned among the *libri non recipiendi* (ib. p. 12 and p. 13).⁷⁹

3. OF THIS WORLD

From the middle of the fifth century literary Christian poetry is increasingly regarded and experienced as literature.⁸⁰ In the library of a friend of Sidonius Apollinaris, Prudentius stands beside Horace; he has become a piece of the Graeco-Roman cultural patrimonium. *Epist.* 2,9,4 of Sidonius (ed. A. Loyen, vol. 2, p. 64) reads as follows:

Nam similis scientiae uiri, hinc Augustinus, hinc Varro, hinc Horatius, hinc Prudentius lectitabantur.

For it was a frequent practice to read writers whose artistry was of a similar kind—here Augustine, there Varro, here Horace, there Prudentius. (transl. W.B. Anderson)

In the fourth and first half of the fifth century some less radical Christians, like Ausonius, Jovius⁸¹ and Licentius, wrote, mainly or exclusively, profane verse. Apparently it was not evident to them that their Christianity should transform their poetical persona and that poetry had to be 'christianized'. The vehement reactions of Paulinus of Nola and Augustine are known. Thus Paulinus wrote to Jovius (*Epist.* 16,6, CSEL 29,121), that he should be-

⁷⁸ (Roermond—Maaseik 1958-1962) I, 1037, s.v. "Hymne".

⁷⁹ See Costanza 1985 (n. 3) 254 n. 3.

⁸⁰ Cf. Herzog 1975 (n. 1) LIV.

⁸¹ On whom see Erdt 1976 (n. 25) 10-14.

come a *dei uates*,⁸² and further (16,9, ib. 122-3):

Ingenii .. tui facultates et omnes mentis ac linguae opes deo dedica immolans ei, sicut scriptum est, sacrificium laudis ore facundo et corde deuoto.

Dedicate to God your powers of mind and all the resources of intellect and tongue; offer to Him, as Scripture says, the sacrifice of praise with eloquent tongue and devoted heart. (transl. P.G. Walsh)

Augustine's letter to Licentius, already referred to above, breathes the same spirit. Indeed, Paulinus is therein held up as a model.

After 450 a number of Christian authors, among them even future bishops, still continued to write pagan or profane verse, in some cases alongside Christian poems. Apparently, now that paganism seemed definitely vanquished, mythology was in their eyes no longer a dangerous pagan 'doctrine', but merely a harmless literary subject matter.

But the treatment of profane, and in particular mythological, topics and the writing of poetic *nugae* was still not self-evident and by no means equally acceptable in every position.

Sidonius Apollinaris, who in the second half of the fifth century, in a Gaul conquered by the Germans, had sought consolation among the Muses and written mainly profane poems, was of the opinion that he had to cease such activity once he had become bishop as it did not befit his episcopal dignity. He writes in this connection (*Epist.* 9,12,1, ed. A. Loyer, vol. 3, p. 160):

Primum ab exordio religiosae professionis huic principaliter exercitio renuntiaui, quia nimium facilitati posset accomodari, si me occupasset leuitas uersuum, quem respicere coeperat grauitas actionum.

But in the first place, I especially renounced this exercise of verse-writing from the very beginning of my religious profession because undoubtedly it might be a concession to weakness if I occupied myself with the levity of verse-writing when seriousness of action had become my duty. (transl. W.B. Anderson)

He stopped writing verses *clerici ne quid maculet rigorem fama poetae* (*Epist.* 9,16,55-6, ib. p. 181). As bishop he wrote only exceptionally, upon the express insistence of friends, a profane poem. Besides these, however, a few Christian metrical inscriptions were written in this period of his life, e.g. on the occasion of the consecration of a church. Indeed, it should be pointed out that *Epist.*

⁸² Cf. Prudentius *Ham.* 575, in connection with David.

9,16,3,57 ff. (ib. p. 181-2) makes it clear that what Sidonius found unfit for clerics was the writing of profane verse; he had no objections against religious poetry:⁸³

Denique ad quoduis epigramma posthac
non ferar pronus, teneroque metro
uel graui nullum cito cogar exhinc
promere carmen:
persecutorum nisi quaestiones
forsitan dicam meritosque caelum
martyras mortis pretio parasse
praemia uitae.⁸⁴

Lastly I shall not henceforth plunge headlong into the writing of a trivial poem, nor from this time on shall I be easily induced to produce a poem in either light or weighty measure—Unless perhaps I tell of the inquisitions of the persecutors and how the martyrs, earning a place in heaven, won the reward of life at the cost of death. (transl. W. B. Anderson)

But his intention to write such poetry on the martyrs apparently did not materialize.

Dracontius and Ennodius wrote both profane and Christian verse. In this respect, Fontaine speaks of the secularization of the inspiration of Christian authors, and advances the question of “les limites de la christianisation de la poésie romaine tardive.”⁸⁵ With regard to Ennodius one reads in Schanz—Hosius: “Freilich als er Geistlicher geworden war, war er sich bewußt, daß das Versemachen eigentlich unterbleiben sollte.”⁸⁶ Telling in this connection are *Carm.* 1,6 *Praef.* and 1,9, *Praef.* (ed. F. Vogel, p. 4-5 and p. 40-1): *ca.* 500 the priest Ennodius still feels compelled to explain why he continues to write poetry. According to his *Eucharisticon de uita sua* (ib. p. 302), he had promised God, during a serious illness, that he would stop writing profane verse.⁸⁷

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Poetry, even explicitly Christian verse, which was not meant for

⁸³ Some who cite 9,12,1 and 9,16,3, v. 55-6, overlook 9,16,3, v. 57 ff.

⁸⁴ Isabella Gualandri, *Furtiva lectio. Studi su Sidonio Apollinare* (Milano 1979) 4 ff., 7 and 10, emphasizes that Sidonius does not ‘condemn’ his earlier poetry *in toto*, but in fact only takes aim at his *nugae*; when he disowns such *nugae* as bishop it is, in her view, a matter of *decus* rather than a matter of conviction.

⁸⁵ 1981 (n. 1) 284.

⁸⁶ M. Schanz—C. Hosius, *Geschichte der römischen Literatur bis zum Gesetzgebungswerk des Kaisers Justinian IV 2* (München 1920) 144; cf. O. Bardenhewer, *Geschichte der altkirchlichen Literatur V* (Freiburg 1932) 237.

⁸⁷ He did not then promise to stop writing poetry (altogether), as Bardenhewer V (n. 86) 237 wrongly states.

immediate ecclesiastical use, for a long time formed both a theoretical and a practical problem. Christians wanted to focus fundamentally on the sphere of the heavens. In literature the *Instrumentalwert* of literature was of prime importance.⁸⁸ A significant fact is that the Christian poets always felt a need to justify their poetic activity; equally significant is Augustine's theoretical stance in *De doctrina christiana* and what *homines graues* in his view think of any special attention to literary form.

On the other hand, the small number of references to Christian poets in the works of Ambrose, Jerome and Augustine proves little. For by the end of the fourth century not much Christian poetry was available,⁸⁹ biblical epic possibly provoked a number of specific reservations, and conditions after 410 will not have facilitated the spread of the work of Prudentius.

In any event, 'literary' Christian poetry gradually acquired its own place and specific recognition because after 313 Christians gradually adopted a different attitude towards the world and towards culture, and because, as noted above, they wanted to achieve, in addition to the propagation of the Christian message, a Christian civilization in which there would be room for cultural aspirations comparable to those of cultured pagans. Significant is Jerome's *De uiris illustribus* and the varied poetic *œuvre* of Prudentius. A next step in this evolution becomes apparent from the fact that e.g. Sidonius Apollinaris speaks of Christian poets as men of letters.

Things were different for the verse intended for liturgical use and for the *loca sancta*. The initiative, however, had lain, rather early, with the 'heretics'; there was continuous resistance in certain circles to non-biblical chants in the liturgy; initially no use was made of classical literary forms. It is significant that bishops wrote the classically-moulded hymns accepted by the Church and that a future bishop, bishops and a pope produced a series of metrical *tituli* destined effectively for church use.

Profane verses, in particular *nugae*, did not befit a Christian poet, *a fortiori* a priest or a bishop. Hence, Paulinus of Nola's detachment from Ausonius and Augustine's criticism of Licentius; hence also, at a later stage, a number of statements by Sidonius Apollinaris and Ennodius. Some pronouncements of Sidonius, for that matter, prove that he approached 'literary' Christian poetry as literature; and someone like Ennodius only reluctantly put an end to his profane poetic activities.

⁸⁸ Cf. Kirsch 1988 (n. 25) 16-17.

⁸⁹ Cf. Thraede 1965 (n. 31) 22 and 26-7 and Kirsch 1989 (n. 15) 140 ff.

THE CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE (JOHN 2,13-25) IN JUVENCUS AND NONNUS

by

A. HILHORST

In the fourth century a new Christian genre, biblical epic, arose, consisting of rewritings of the subject-matter of Scripture according to the rules of classical epic poetry. Especially in the Latin West, where it developed first, it found fertile soil: Juvencus, Sedulius Apollinaris, Avitus, and Arator are prominent names.¹ In the East the poet Nonnus and minor authors like Eudocia come to mind.² Two of these authors, the Spanish priest Juvencus (c. A.D. 330) and the Egyptian Nonnus of Panopolis (fifth c. A.D.³), had the ambition to offer a verse to verse paraphrase of a biblical text. The former, in his *Euangeliorum libri quattuor*, a work of 3211 hexameters, rendered the account of the Gospels following mainly Matthew but occasionally switching to the other evangelists; the latter, in his *Metabole*, offered a paraphrase of St John's Gospel in 3635 hexameter lines.⁴ In this paper I shall compare their respective approaches on the basis of the story of the cleansing of the Temple as it is told in John 2,13-25. This story is one of the few for which also Juvencus follows John rather than Matthew.⁵

¹ Cf. W. Kirsch, *Die lateinische Versepeik des 4. Jahrhunderts* (Schriften zur Geschichte und Kultur der Antike 28; Berlin 1989) and the literature mentioned there. I was unable to see M. Flieger, *Interpretationen zum Bibeldichter Juvencus* (Beiträge zur Altertumskunde 40; Stuttgart 1993).

² Cf. J. Golega, *Studien über die Evangeliendichtung des Nonnos von Panopolis. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Bibeldichtung im Altertum* (Breslauer Studien zur historischen Theologie 15; Breslau 1930) 88-91.94-6.131, K. Thraede, "Epos", *RAC* 5 (1962) 983-1042, esp. 999-1006.

³ E. Livrea, *Nonno di Panopoli. Parafrasi del Vangelo di S. Giovanni. Canto XVIII. Introduzione, testo critico, traduzione e commentario* (Speculum 9; Napoli 1989), 19-30, dates the *Metabole* c. 445-450.

⁴ Editions: Gai Vetti Aquilini *Iuueni Evangeliorum libri quattuor. Recensuit et commentario critico instruxit Iohannes Huemer* (CSEL 24; Pragae-Vindobonae-Lipsiae 1891); *Nonni Panopolitani Paraphrasis S. Evangelii Ioannei. Edidit Augustinus Scheindler* (Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana; Lipsiae 1881).

⁵ The story is also in Matthew 21,12-13, Mark 11,15-17, and Luke 19,45-6,

It is clear that a two-stage comparison must be made: only after comparing Juvencus and Nonnus with their respective parent texts can we put their procedures side by side. Which texts were these? As for Juvencus, the Vulgate was not yet in existence in his days; his Gospel text must have been some form of the Old Latin⁶ (although he may have had access to the Greek text too⁷). I shall take the text of the oldest manuscript available, Codex Vercellensis, as my basis; among the manuscripts Nestler found as most related to Juvencus' paraphrase it is the only one which is free of Vulgate influence.⁸ In the case of Nonnus I shall start from the Nestle-Aland text. True, R. Janssen has constructed a *Vorlage* which considerably diverges from the normal Greek text of John, but since we have no evidence independent of Nonnus for the existence of such a text, I shall pass over it.⁹

* * *

Juvencus being the earlier author, I shall begin with Latin rather than Greek. The passages in John are indicated by their chapter and verse numbers, in Juvencus by the line number only. The texts in question, John 2,13-25 and Juvencus 2,153-76, run as follows.

but these versions omit the subject-matter of John 2,18-25, although 2,18-22 has a certain counterpart in Matthew 21,23-27, Mark 11,27-33 and Luke 20,1-8.

⁶ Cf. K. Marold, "Über das Evangelienbuch des Juvencus in seinem Verhältniss zum Bibeltext", *Zeitschrift für wissenschaftliche Theologie* 33 (1890) 329-41, esp. 337-41; N. Hansson, *Textkritisches zu Juvencus. Mit vollständigem Index verborum* (Diss. Lund 1950) 15.

⁷ Cf. H. Nestler, *Studien über die Messiade des Juvencus* (Progr. Passau 1909/10, Passau 1910) 7.20-27.30-31.

⁸ Edition: A. Gasquet, *Codex Vercellensis* (Collectanea Biblica Latina 3; Romae—Ratisbonae—Neo-Eboraci 1914). Cf. Nestler (n. 7) 27-30.

⁹ R. Janssen, *Das Johannesevangelium nach der Paraphrase des Nonnus Panopolitanus. Mit einem ausführlichen kritischen Apparat* (TU 23,4; Leipzig 1903). Cf. Golega (n. 2) 116-120.144.

John 2,13-25

Juvencus 2,153-76

- 13 Et prope erat pascha Iudaeorum et ascendit Hyerosolimis Iesus.
- 14 Et inuenit in templo uendentes oues et boues et columbas et nummularios sedentes.
- 15 Et fecit tanquam flagellum de restibus et omnes eiecit de templo, oues et boues et columbas, et nummulariorum effudit pecuniam et mensas eorum euerit.
- 16 Et uendentibus columbas dixit: Tollite haec istinc et nolite facere domum patris mei domum negotiationis.
- 17 Tunc rememorati sunt discipuli eius quod scriptum sit: Zelus domus tuae comedit me.
- 18 Responderunt ergo Iudaei et dixerunt ei: Quod signum ostendis nobis quia haec facis?
- 19 Respondit Iesus et dixit illis: Soluite hoc templum et in triduo resuscitabo illud.
- 20 Dixerunt autem Iudaei: xlii annis aedificatum est hoc templum et tu tribus diebus resuscitabis illud?
- 21 Ille autem dicebat de templo corporis sui.
- 22 Postquam surrexit ergo a mortuis, rememorati sunt discipuli eius quod hoc dixit et crediderunt scripturae et uerbo quod dixit Iesus.
- 23 Cum autem esset Iesus Hyerosolymis per pascha in die festo, multi crediderunt in nomine eius uidentes signa quae faciebat.
- 24 Ipse autem Iesus non credebat se illis, eo quod nosset omnes
- 25 et quia non desideraret ut aliquis testimonium diceret de homine. Ipse enim sciebat quid esset in homine.
- Inde ubi Iudaeis aderant sollemnia paschae, ad Solymos direxit iter temploque subibat.
- 155 Repperit hic populum uenalia multa locantem: pars uendebat oues, pars corpora magna iuuenum, pars inhians nummis arti numerare uacabat. Restibus hic Christus conecit uerbera flagri et tales populos sancta proburbat ab aede, 160 et mensas uertens aeris profundit acruos
- et superincrepitans: Procul haec auferte profani, ut meus hic genitor, non sordida lucra colantur.
- Tum poscens signum plebes Iudaea fremebat, quo fidens animos in talia facta leuaret.
- 165 Ventura obscuris tunc Christus talia miscet: Soluite pollutis manibus uenerabile templum hoc, ego restituam, cum tertia lumina solis incipiet rutilam terris infundere lucem. Illi inter sese tractantes murmure caeco: 170 Hoc, aiunt, uix sex et quadraginta per annos constructum ueteris regni molimine templum tu poteris tribus in spatiis renouare dierum? Hoc uerbum quondam post tempora debita digni cognouere uiri, proprio de corpore Christum delubrum dixisse dei.
- 175

Sed signa uidentes
tum multi cepere fidem sanctumque secuti.

The minimal change required for an epic paraphrase is, of course, the introduction of the dactylic verse, which entails the necessity of providing substitutes for words and forms which do not fit into the metre. Words like *nummularius* (2,14-15), *negotiatio* (2,16), *testimonium* (2,25) must be abandoned; archaic variants,¹⁰ such as *iuvencum* = *iuvencorum* in 156, *plebes* = *plebs* in 163, *molimen* = *molimentum* in 171, *-ere* = *-erunt* in 174 and 176 help to establish hexameters.

But Juvenecus does not leave it at that. First of all, the sentences undergo a substantial rebuilding. John's parataxis with its ubiquitous *et* (or *ergo*) makes room for subordination with clauses and participles or for asyndeton and adverbs like *inde* (153), *hic* (155), *tum* (163.176), *tunc* (165). The direct question in 2,18 *Responderunt ergo Iudaei et dixerunt ei: Quod signum ostendis nobis quia haec facis?* is rendered indirectly¹¹ in 163-164:

Tunc poscens signum plebes Iudaea fremebat,
quo fidens animos in talia facta leuaret,

and the explanatory verse 2,21 *Ille autem dicebat de templo corporis sui* is integrated into the paraphrase of the first half of 2,22 in 173-175:

Hoc uerbum quondam post tempora debita digni
cognouere uiri, proprio de corpore Christum
delubrum dixisse dei.

Juvenecus even feels free to remove repetitious or otherwise embarrassing language.¹² He omits 2,17 altogether. Its first part returns in 2,22, and the Psalm passage quoted in it only serves, so he seems to reason, to hold up the narrative.¹³ The same goes for the first half of 2,23, which brings no news after 2,13. The pigeons of 2,14.16, perhaps too idyllic for a *carmen heroicum*, are absent from Juvenecus's tale. Likewise, Juvenecus omits that with which he does not know what to do.¹⁴ A telling example of this is found in his rendition of 2,22-25. First of all, it apparently does not interest him that the disciples come to understanding after Jesus' resurrection: John's *postquam surrexit ergo a mortuis* (2,22) blurs into *quondam post tempora debita* (173). He also omits the disciples' be-

¹⁰ For more examples, cf. J. Huemer, "Kritische Beiträge zur *historia euangelica* des Juvenecus. I", *WS* 2 (1880) 81-112, esp. 84-9.

¹¹ Cf. H. Widmann, *De Gaio Vettio Aquilino Iuveneco carminis evangelici poeta et Vergili imitatore* (Diss. Breslau 1905) 51-4.

¹² For more examples, cf. Marold (n. 6) 332-4, Widmann (n. 11) 32-9, Nestler (n. 7) 61-3.—The passage in question is Ps. 69,10.

¹³ For Juvenecus' leaving out of Bible quotations, cf. Widmann (n. 11) 33-4.

¹⁴ Cf. also Nestler (n. 7) 61-3.

lief in the scripture. Especially 2,23-25 is subjected to a metamorphosis. Admittedly, the passage is not without its problems. According to John, people come to belief when they see the signs that Jesus gives, and yet Jesus does not trust himself to them; indeed the conversions are almost represented as only seeming conversions. Apparently, Juvencus is unable to place this. So he omits the mention of Jesus' distrust and records the conversions coolly as the consequence of seeing Jesus' signs.

On the other hand our poet adds exegetical information¹⁵ like *ueteris regni molimine*¹⁶ in 171, or a few words to interpret a Johannine phrase, like *quo fidens animos in talia facta leuaret* (164) for John's *quia haec facis*, or *Ventura obscuris tunc Christus talia miscet* (165) for John's *Respondit Iesus et dixit*. Especially interesting are the added elements in his description of Jesus' Jewish antagonists to which I shall come back in a moment.

As for the vocabulary, Juvencus introduces more abundant phrases,¹⁷ *pascha* becoming *sollemnia paschae* (153), *ascendit* becoming *iter direxit ad* (154), *flagellum* becoming *uerbera flagri* (158), and *tribus diebus* becoming *tribus in spatiis .. dierum* (172). Likewise he now and then adds an epithet: *sancta ... aede* (159), *sordida lucra* (162), *uenerabile templum* (166). Often this style serves to evoke emotion. Where John simply spoke of *boues*, *pecunia*, *templum*, and *dixit*, Juvencus uses *corpora magna iuuenicum* (156), *aeris .. acervos* (160), *sancta .. aede* (159) / *uenerabile templum* (166), *superincreditas* (161), inspiring hugeness in the first two cases, religious awe in the third, and anger in the last. The money changers who in John did no more than "sit", are depicted by Juvencus as "peering with parted lips at the coins, absorbed in counting their profit" (157):

*pars inhians nummis artem*¹⁸ *numerare uacabat.*

¹⁵ For more examples, cf. Marold (n. 6) 334-7, Widmann (n. 11) 39-47.

¹⁶ Cf. J. de Wit, *Ad Iuuenii Evangeliorum librum secundum commentarius exegeticus* (Diss. Groningen 1947) 49-50.

¹⁷ Cf. G. Simonetti Abbolito, "Osservazioni su alcuni procedimenti compositivi della tecnica parafrastica di Giovenco", *Orpheus* 6 (1985) 304-24.

¹⁸ According to J. T. Hatfield, *A Study of Juvencus* (Diss. Johns Hopkins University; Bonn 1890) 30, *ars* means 'the money acquired by trading' here. Huemer (n. 4), following Arevalus, reads *arti* (*arti numerare = arti numerandi*); M. Petschenig, review of Huemer's edition, *Berliner Philologische Wochenschrift* 11 (1891) 137-44, esp. 140, followed by de Wit (n. 15) 47 and Hansson (n. 6) 31.154.164 n. 10, reads *sortem* "capital" (according to Hansson its meaning is "proceeds, interest" here). A. Knappitsch, *Gai Vetti Aquilini Iuuenii euangeliorum libri quattor. In sermonem Germanicum transtulit et enarrauit* (Jahresb. Graz 1910-1913) II (1911)

This line is in itself the third and most voluminous member of a vivid description structured by *pars ... pars ... pars*. Historical presents, absent from the Gospel text, add a touch of drama as well. It may be no coincidence that they are used almost only to evoke actions taken by Christ (158-160.165).

Juvenius is a diligent imitator of the poetic language of the classical authors. His archaisms have already been mentioned. Furthermore, there are instances of simplex pro composito (155 *locantem* = *collocantem*, 160 *uertens* = *euertens*), poetic plural (158 *uerbera*, 159 *populos*), zeugma (162 *ut meus hic genitor, non sordida lucra colantur*), and hypallage (172 *tribus in spatiis .. dierum*). Verse 157 seems to provide an instance of an etymological play dear to Virgil:¹⁹ *nummis ... numerare*. A line may begin *inde ubi* (153) or *ille inter sese* (169).²⁰ *Solymos* (154) not only skirts the intractable *Hierosolyma*, but also follows the poetic habit of denoting a place by its inhabitants. *Genitor* (162), rare in prose, is typical of poetic diction (Virgil has it some 60 times). Although Juvenius likes variation in his vocabulary, e.g. *templum* (154.166.171) / *aedes* (159) / *delubrum* (175), he is not absolutely dismissive of Christian terms,²¹ cf. *pascha* (153), *signum* (175), *sanctus* (176), and *templum* just mentioned. Our passage renders one neologism,²² *superin-crepitans* in 161, unless we are to read *super increpitans*, reminding us of the frequent use Silius Italicus makes of *increpitans* in the second foot and the arsis of the third foot to add vigour when introducing direct speech.²³

This leads us to the reminiscences of the classical poets, in particular Virgil,²⁴ to whom he explicitly refers in verse 10 of his *prae-fatio*. In the passage we are studying the following instances may be mentioned. *Venerabile templum* (166) is the end of a line in Ovid *Pont.* 3,3,91, *murmure caeco* is Virgilian (*Aen.* 12,591). *Inhians*

21 proposes *partem*, "i.e. portionem, frugem, quam nummularii pecuniis permutandis parabant". The MSS. have *arte*, *artem*, *partim*, or *ast*.

¹⁹ For more instances, cf. Huemer (n. 9) 110-112. G.J.M. Bartelink has studied this procedure in his *Etymologiserend bij Vergilius* (Amsterdam 1965).

²⁰ Cf. Virgil *Georg.* 2,367; 3,327; *Aen.* 3,69; 5,139; 6,201; 8,407; 10,888 and *Georg.* 4,174; *Aen.* 8,452; 10,146; 12,720 respectively. Cf. Hatfield (n. 17) 41.

²¹ Cf. P.G. van der Nat, *Divinus vere poeta. Enige beschouwingen over ontstaan en karakter der Christelijke Latijnse poëzie* (Leiden 1963) 22-3; M. Testard, "Juvenius et le sacré dans un épisode des Évangéliorum libri IV", *BAGB* 1990, 3-31, esp. 22.

²² For more instances, cf. Huemer (n. 9) 94-5, Hatfield (n. 17) 47, Testard (n. 20) 14.

²³ Cf. Testard (n. 20) 9. Juvenius uses *increpitans* in this function in 1,348.

²⁴ Cf. Huemer (n. 9) 82-3, Hatfield (n. 17) 40-7, Widmann (n. 11) 57-85, Testard (n. 20) 5 (bibliography).

(157) perhaps evokes the restless behaviour of Dido in *Aen.* 4,64 *pectoribus inhians spirantia consulit exta, uentura obscuris ... miscet* (166) echoes the impressive oracle of the Sibyl in *Aen.* 6,100 *obscuris uera inuoluens; corpora magna iuuencum* (156) most probably varies *Georg.* 3,369 *corpora magna boum* (cf. also *Aen.* 2,18 *delecta .. uirum corpora*), like *procul haec auferte profani* (161) does *Aen.* 6,258 *procul o procul este profani*. Equally poetic is the circumstantial phrasing of time²⁵ in 167-8:

cum tertia lumina solis
incipient rutilam terris infundere lucem,

cf. Virgil *Aen.* 11,210:

tertia lux gelidam caelo dimouerat umbram.

Moreover, we may compare *tertia lumina solis* with Lucretius 6, 1197 *octauoque fere candenti lumine solis*. *Lumina solis* is also in Ovid *Met.* 1,135 and as a variant in Virgil *Aen.* 6,255,²⁶ and *incipient rutilam* reminds of *Georg.* 1,454 *incipiunt rutilo*.

Juvenicus's liberty to add ornaments is not only employed for the benefit of aesthetics. In a study published in 1979 Jean-Michel Poinssotte demonstrated how many unfavourable traits in comparison with the Gospel text Juvenicus adds to the picture of the Jews.²⁷ This can also be observed in the passage under discussion. I mentioned already the uneasy scene of the Jewish money changers (157), which should be combined with the explicit mention of *dirty* profit (162 *sordida lucra*, over against *negotiationis* in John²⁸). There is, however, more to be recorded. Jesus addresses the money changers as *profani* (161). The *plebes Iudaea* "asks

²⁵ For more examples, cf. Widmann (n. 11) 16.45.63-4.

²⁶ Cf. further R.P. Hoogma, *Der Einfluss Vergils auf die Carmina Latina Epigraphica. Eine Studie mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der metrisch-technischen Grundsätze der Entlehnung* (Diss. Nijmegen 1959) 282. Juvenicus has *tertia lumina* also 3,589, and *lumina solis* also 3,16.206.

²⁷ J.-M. Poinssotte, *Juvenicus et Israël. La représentation des Juifs dans le premier poème latin chrétien* (Publications de l'Université de Rouen 57, Paris 1979). Poinssotte adds to this, but I am not sure he is right, the avoidance of the unclassical *Jesus* in favour of *Christus* (pp. 50-1). Actually Juvenicus uses *Christus* three times and never *Jesus* in this passage, whereas John has *Jesus* four times and never *Christus*; generally speaking, the numerical proportion *Christus* : *Jesus* is 1 : 8 in the Gospels and 4 : 1 in Juvenicus. A.P. Orbán, "Die Versifikation von Lk 1,5-80 in den *Euangeliorum libri quattuor* des Juvenicus. Eine Analyse von Juvenic. I 1-132", *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 83 (1992) 224-44, which treats similar matter, came too late to my attention to be used in this paper.

²⁸ But the synoptic parallels are much harsher here, cf. Matthew 21,13: *Scriptum est: Domus mea domus orationis uocabitur. Vos autem fecistis illam speluncam latronum*.

with confused cries", *fremebat* (163). Jesus challenges them to destroy the temple "with their defiled hands", *pollutis manibus* (166). This addition admits of several interpretations—Jews are people with defiled hands by definition; destroying the temple is a deed of impiety; the expression foreshadows the Jews' killing of God's son —, but in any case the words are disparaging. The Jews' answer to Jesus (2,18) is preceded by an internal deliberation accompanied by a sinister *murmure caeco* (169). Occasionally the effect is enhanced by a skilled confrontation of ugly and fair: *tales populos* versus *sancta ... aede* (159), *meus genitor* versus *sordida lucra* (162), *pollutis manibus* versus *uenerabile templum* (166). All this, uncomfortable though it is, need not, however, be the expression of a virulent personal hate Juvenecus entertains of Jews, but may be to him a matter of course, learned at his mother's knee, in a tradition ultimately going back to the New Testament.²⁹ In a similar casual way, the disciples (2,22) have become *digni .. uiri* (173-174); the relative prominence women had in Jesus' environment has long been forgotten.

Two final remarks. First, the tendencies described above may concur to produce a special effect. Thus the address of the Jewish money changers as *profani* (161) is without doubt extra piquant by its echo of the famous passage in Virgil *Aen.* 6,258, *procul o procul este profani*, by which the Sibyl begins her oracle. Second, as will have become clear, it is precisely by the liberties he takes that Juvenecus shows his cards. Jews have defiled hands, the disciples are "men" and "worthy";³⁰ our poet would probably be sincerely surprised if we pointed out to him that these features are not in the Gospel text.

* * *

Well over a century later, Nonnus made a similar attempt to paraphrase John. He was one of those curious men of letters in late Antiquity who combined pagan and Christian interests.³¹ Indeed, he is the author of the *Dionysiaca*, a huge epos (some 21,000 lines, nearly six times the size of the *Metabole*) describing the myth of Dionysus. The paraphrase of St John's Gospel to which we now turn, shows so many similarities in style with it as to

²⁹ Cf. my review of Poinssotte's book in *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 11 (1980) 110-111.

³⁰ But De Wit (n. 16) may be right in explaining *digni* as "*digni iudicati a Christo ut hanc rem perciperent*".

³¹ On them, cf. my "Was Philo Read by Pagans? The Statement on Heliodorus in Socrates *Hist. Eccl.* 5.22", *The Studia Philonica Annual* 4 (1992) 75-7.

make it reasonably sure that the same author is responsible for both poems. We begin again by presenting the Gospel text and its paraphrase in Nonnus *Metab.* 2,70-120 side by side; also here the chapter plus verse number refers to John, the single line number to Nonnus.

John 2, 13-25

13 Καὶ ἐγγὺς ἦν τὸ πάσχα τῶν Ἰουδαίων, καὶ ἀνέβη εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα ὁ Ἰησοῦς.
 14 Καὶ εὗρεν ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ τοὺς πωλοῦντας βόας καὶ πρόβατα καὶ περιστεράς
 καὶ τοὺς κερματιστάς καθήμενους,

15 καὶ ποιήσας φραγέλλιον ἐκ σχοινίων πάντας ἐξέβαλεν ἐκ τοῦ ἱεροῦ, τὰ τε
 πρόβατα καὶ τοὺς βόας,

καὶ τῶν κολλυβιστῶν ἐξέχεεν τὸ κέρμα καὶ τὰς τραπέζας ἀνέτρεψεν,

16 καὶ τοῖς τὰς περιστεράς πωλοῦσιν εἶπεν· ἄρατε ταῦτα ἐντεῦθεν, μὴ ποιεῖτε
 τὸν οἶκον τοῦ πατρὸς μου οἶκον ἐμπορίου.

17 ἐμνήσθησαν οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ ὅτι γεγραμμένον ἐστίν· ὁ ζῆλος τοῦ οἴκου
 σου καταφάγεται με.

18 Ἀπεκρίθησαν οὖν οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι καὶ εἶπαν αὐτῷ· τί σημεῖον δεικνύεις ἡμῖν ὅτι
 ταῦτα ποιεῖς;

19 ἀπεκρίθη Ἰησοῦς καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· λύσατε τὸν ναὸν τοῦτον καὶ ἐν τρισὶν
 ἡμέραις ἐγερῶ αὐτόν.

20 εἶπαν οὖν οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι· τεσσεράκοντα καὶ ἕξ ἔτεσιν οἰκοδομήθη ὁ ναὸς
 οὗτος,

καὶ σὺ ἐν τρισὶν ἡμέραις ἐγερεῖς αὐτόν;

21 ἐκεῖνος δὲ ἔλεγεν περὶ τοῦ ναοῦ τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ.

22 ὅτε οὖν ἠγέρθη ἐκ νεκρῶν,

ἐμνήσθησαν οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ ὅτι τοῦτο ἔλεγεν, καὶ ἐπίστευσαν τῇ γραφῇ
 καὶ τῷ λόγῳ ὃν εἶπεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς.

23 Ὡς δὲ ἦν ἐν τοῖς Ἱεροσολύμοις ἐν τῷ πάσχα ἐν τῇ ἑορτῇ, πολλοὶ ἐπίστευσαν
 εἰς τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ θεωροῦντες αὐτοῦ τὰ σημεῖα ἃ ἐποίει·

24 αὐτὸς δὲ Ἰησοῦς οὐκ ἐπίστευεν αὐτόν αὐτοῖς διὰ τὸ αὐτόν γινώσκειν
 πάντας

25 καὶ ὅτι οὐ χρεῖαν εἶχεν ἵνα τις μαρτυρήσῃ περὶ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου· αὐτὸς γὰρ
 ἐγίνωσκεν τί ἦν ἐν τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ.

Nonnus 2, 70-120

- 70 ἐγγύθι γὰρ τότε πάσχα· θυηπολίην δὲ γεραίρων
 εὐαγέων ἀνέβαινεν ἐς ἔδραν Ἰεροσολύμων
 σὺν πινυτοῖς ἐτάροισι. θεοκλήτῳ δ' ἐνὶ νηῷ
 εὐκεραίους βόας εὔρε καὶ εἰροπόκων στίχα μήλων
 καὶ στικτὰς μελέεσσι πελειάδας· ἐζόμενον δὲ
- 75 κερμοδότην χορὸν εὔρε φιλοπλούτοιο τραπέζης·
 καὶ πολὺν ἔσμον ὅπῳ πεφιλέμπορον ὑψόθι θάκων
 ὦνιον ἔργον ἔχοντα. καὶ ἐν παλάμῃσιν ἐλίξας
 σύμπλοκον ἐκ σχοίνοιο νόθην ποίησεν ἱμάσθλην
 καὶ βοήην ἀγέλην ἐξήλασε καὶ στίχα μήλων
- 80 νόσφι δόμου θυόεντος· ἐπασσύτερην δὲ κυλίνδων
 κύμβαχον ἠκόντιζε μετάρροπον ἔμπορον ἔδρην
 ἐξ ἱεροῦ δαπέδοιο, κυβιστητῆρι δὲ παλμῷ
 ἐξέχεεν χθονὶ κέρμα παλιστρέπτοιο τραπέζης.
 ἀνδρὶ δὲ πιπρήσκοντι πελειάδας ἴαχε φωνήν·
- 85 ταῦτα μεταστήσασθε λιθώδεος ἔκτοθι νηοῦ
 μηδὲ φιλοκτεάνοιο νόου βεβαρηότες οἷστρον
 ἔμπορίης δόμον ἀγνὸν ἐμοῦ τέλεσητε τοκῆος·
 εὐχῆς γὰρ τόδε δῶμα. καὶ ἐμνήσαντο μαθηταί,
 ὅτι θεοπνεύστῳ κεχαραγμένον ἔπλετο βίβλω·
- 90 ζῆλος ἐμὲ ζαθέοιο τεοῦ καταδαίνυται οἴκου.
 καὶ οἱ ἀπειλήτειραν ἀνήρυγε λαὸς ἰωήν·
 ποῖα παρ' Ἑβραίοις ἑτερότροπα σήματα δείξεις,
 ὅτι σὺ ταῦτα τέλεσας; ἀμιλλητῆρι δὲ λαῷ
 θαμβάλην ἀγνωστον ἀναξ ἠρεῦγετο φωνήν·
- 95 λύσατε τοῦτο μέλαθρον, ἐγὼ δὲ μιν αὐτὸς ἐγείρω
 ἡμασιν ἐν τρισσοῖσιν. ἐπεφθέγγαντο δὲ λαοί·
 ὃν Σολομὼν ποίησε λίθων ἑτερόχροι κόσμῳ
 εἰς δολιχὴν βαλβίδα παλινδίνητον ὑφαίνων,
 ἐξ καὶ τεσσαράκοντα φιλοκτίστων ἐνιαυτῶν,
- 100 κτίσμασιν ὀπλοτέροισι παλὶλλυτον οἶκον ἐγείρεις
 τοσσατίην μετὰ νύσαν ἐπὶ τριτάτης δρόμον ἡοῦς;
 κείνος νηὸν ἔειπεν ἐοῦ χροός, ὃν τινι θεσμῷ
 φρικτῷ Χριστὸς ἔμελλεν ἐπὶ τρίτον ἡμᾶρ ἐγείρειν.
 ἀλλ' ὅτε δὴ μετὰ κόλπον ἀνοστήτοιο βερέθρου
- 105 νόστιμος ἐξ Αἰδαο παλινζώω τινὶ πότμῳ
 ἀρχαίην παλινόρσος ἔην ἀνεδύσατο τιμὴν
 οὐρανίην, τότε μῶνον ἀνεμνήσαντο μαθηταί,
 ὅτι δόμον δέμας εἶπε· θεογλώσσοιο δὲ βίβλου
 θεῖον ἐπιστώσαντο λόγον πείθοντό τε μύθῳ,
- 110 Ἰησοῦς δὲν ἔειπε. θεοδομήτῳ δ' ἐπὶ νηῷ
 ἄχρως ἔην καὶ ἔδεθλα διέστιχεν Ἰεροσολύμων
 εὐάξων ἐτι πάσχα, καὶ ἀρνοφάγων ἱερῶν
 ὄργια μυστιπόλεψε φιλόκροτα θυιάς ἑορτή,
 πολλοὶ λύσαν ἀπιστον ἐπετρέψαντο θυέλλαις
- 115 Χριστοῦ πίστιν ἔχοντες ἐς οὐνομα· πειθομένοις δὲ
 ἀνδράσιν οὐ πίστευεν ἕδον νοόν· οὐ γὰρ ἀκούειν
 ἄλλου φθεγγομένου νόθης ἐπεδεύετο φωνῆς,
 ὅφρα μάθῃ νόον ἀνδρὸς ἀμάρτυρον· ἔργα δὲ φωτῶν
 ἦδ' ἐκεῖ αὐτοδίδακτος, ὅσα φρενὸς ἐνδοθεν ἀνῆρ
 120 εἶχεν ἀκηρύκτῳ κεκαλυμμένα φάρεϊ σιγῆς.

The first thing that catches the eye is the greater number of lines by Nonnus in comparison with Juvenecus. To explain this, I shall investigate the fragment along the lines followed in studying Juvenecus.

First of all, it comes much more easy to Nonnus than to Juvenecus to recast John's account in hexameter form. On the one hand Greek poetic language offers him alternative endings like -ου and -οιο, -αις and —ησι(ν), -οις and -οισι(ν), doublets like ἐνί / ἐν, εἰς / ἐς, τρίτατος / τρίτος, and verb-forms with and without the augment. On the other hand, as we shall see below, he is so lavish in forming neologisms, adding epithets and making more words out of one that he can always round off his lines to his liking.

Distancing himself from the prose form by these means, Nonnus need hardly diverge from his parent text by revising the sentence structure. On the contrary, he follows John's syntax quite closely; coordination and the order of clauses remain virtually the same. Only in rendering 2,20 a relative clause is introduced.

Nonnus is much more inclined than Juvenecus to render every element in his parent text. Nevertheless, even in his paraphrase there are omissions;³² thus in the pericope which occupies us here, 2,23 θεωροῦντες αὐτοῦ τὰ σημεῖα ἃ ἐποίει and 2,24 διὰ τὸ αὐτὸν γινώσκειν πάντα are left out. H. Nestler, who has studied these cases throughout the *Metabole*, traces the omissions back to omissions in Nonnus's text of John;³³ this explanation, however, has not stood the test of time.

Much more frequently, however, he adds details.³⁴ Some of these are implicit in John, e.g. θνητολίην .. γεραίρων (70), σὺν πινυτοῖς ἐτάροις (72), ἐν παλάμῃσιν ἐλίξας (77). Others contain exegetical information, e.g. ὃν Σολομὼν ποίησε (97), or interpretation, e.g. ἄγνωστον ... φωνήν (94). In other cases he inserts elements taken from the parallel text of the synoptics, e.g. εὐχῆς γὰρ τότε δῶμα (88), cf. Matthew 21,13 καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς· γέγραπται· ὁ οἶκός μου οἶκος προσευχῆς κληθήσεται, ὑμεῖς δὲ αὐτὸν ποιεῖτε σπῆλαιον ληστῶν, or from other parts of the Johannine Gospel itself, e.g. ἀλλ' ὅτε ... ἀνεδύσατο τιμὴν οὐρανίην (104-107), cf. John 12,16 ἀλλ' ὅτε ἐδοξάσθη Ἰησοῦς. In line with this, Nonnus's diction is much more prolix than the Gospel's. Thus he makes an excessive

³² Cf. the examples in Golega (n. 2) 50.97.119-120.

³³ Nestler (n. 7) 63-5.

³⁴ Cf. Golega (n. 2) 120-5.133-42.

use of the epithet.³⁵ Whereas John 2,13-25 has no attributive adjective at all, Nonnus uses almost fifty. Furthermore he has a preference for circumlocutions,³⁶ e.g. ἴαχε φωνήν for εἶπεν (2,16)³⁷ or μετὰ κόλπον ἀνοστήτοιο βερέθρου / νόστιμος ἐξ Ἀΐδαο παλινζώφ τινὶ πότμω / ἀρχαίην παλίνροσος ἦν ἀνεδύσατο τιμὴν / οὐρανίην for ἡγέρθη ἐκ νεκρῶν (2,22).

Many of these additions have an emotional ring.³⁸ Thus in 2,18 ἀπεκρίθησαν ... καὶ εἶπαν is made more threatening: ἀπειλήτειραν ἀνήρυγε .. ἰωήν, and 2,23 πολλοὶ ἐπίστευσαν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ is equipped with a vicious characterization of the believers' previous state of mind: πολλοὶ λύσσαν ἄπιστον ἐπετρέψαντο θυέλλαις / Χριστοῦ πίστιν ἔχοντες ἐς οὐνομα. The curious thing is that this device entirely fails to confer a dramatic force to the narrative. Probably the effect of the violent wording is choked in its own verbosity, the more so since the placid sentence structure of the Gospel is left unaffected.

Of course Nonnus follows the tradition of Greek poetic language, as has been already shown for his morphology. The same trait, however, may be observed in his vocabulary. He enjoys substituting John's Hellenistic prose words by synonyms of the epic tradition: ἱερόν (2,14.15) becomes νηός and δόμος θυόεις respectively, πρόβατον (2,14) becomes μῆλον, περιστερά (2,14.16) πελειάς, the Latin φραγέλλιον (2,15) ἰμάσθλη, πατήρ (2,16) τοκεύς, σημεῖον (2,18) σήματα, ποιεῖν (2,18) τελεῖν, σῶμα (2,21) χρῶς or δέμας, ἴνα (2,25) ὄφρα, cf. also ἔταροι in an addition in 72, and ἄναξ in 94, where John has Ἰησοῦς. He is not dogmatic, though: he keeps words like ἐκχέω (2,15), κέρμα (2,15), τράπεζα (2,15), λύω (2,19), ἐγείρω (2,19.20), and even Christian terms like πάσχα (2,13), μαθητής (2,17.22) and ζῆλος (2,17). A further striking feature is his use of words unknown outside his own *œuvre*;³⁹ in our passage these are θεόκλητος (72; also in his *Dionysiaca*), κερμοδότης (75), ὑπόθι + gen. (76), ἀπειλήτειρα as an adjective⁴⁰ (91;

³⁵ Cf. Golega (n. 2) 49-51, K. Smolak, "Beiträge zur Erklärung der Metabole des Nonnos", *Jahrbuch der österreichischen Byzantinistik* 34 (1984) 1-14, esp. 2-8, Livrea (n. 3) 57-60.

³⁶ Cf. also Nestler (n. 7) 53.

³⁷ This expression still occurs ten times at the end of a verse in the *Metabole*: 1,83; 2,30; 4,80; 6,22; 9,137; 11,121.139.201; 18,66; 21,83.

³⁸ Cf. Golega (n. 2) 120-2.

³⁹ Cf. Golega (n. 2) 50, R. Keydell, "Über die Echtheit der Bibeldichtungen des Apollinaris und des Nonnos", *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 33 (1933) 243-54, esp. 249.

⁴⁰ Nouns used as adjectives occur often with Nonnus, both in the *Dionysiaca* and the *Metabole*, cf. Golega (n. 2) 50.

also *Dion.*), θαμβαλέος (94; also *Dion.*), the heteroclitic dative ἑτερόχροϊ (97), φιλόκτιστος (99), παλλύτος (100), and θυιάς as an adjective (113). In general he has an almost obsessive preference for variation,⁴¹ thus the five instances of the aorist εἰπεῖν in our pericope of John (2,16.18.19.20.22) are rendered as ἵαχε φωνήν (84), ἀνήρυγε .. ἰωήν (91), ἤρεύγετο (94), ἐπεφθέγγαντο (96), and ἔειπε (110). Wordplay⁴² is at work in 108 ὅτι δόμον δέμας εἶπε and 115-116 πειθομένοις δὲ / ἀνδράσιν οὐ πίστευεν ἔδον νοόν.

Both in his *Dionysiaca* and his *Metabole* Nonnus has a number of imitations of earlier epic poets, especially Homer.⁴³ Yet his poem is not Homeric in the sense that Juvenecus's may be called Virgilian. A large part of Nonnus's vocabulary is absent from the Homeric poems, and conversely Homer's many particles are in disuse with Nonnus (but ἀλλ' ὅτε δὴ which opens 104 is, of course, thoroughly Homeric). Consequently it has hardly been possible to find an echo of Homer in the passage we are studying; mention can be made only of ἀνοστήτοιο βερέθρου (104), cf. *Od.* 12,94 δεινοῖο βερέθρου, πείθοντό τε μύθῳ (109) = *Il.* 1,273; *Od.* 17,177, θεοδμήτω δ' ἐπὶ νηῶ (110), cf. *Il.* 8,519 θεοδμήτων ἐπὶ πύργων, all, like the phrases in Homer, at the end of the hexameter. Generally speaking, his style, with its fondness of compounds and disuse of particles, looks more like Apollonius Rhodius than like Homer,⁴⁴ but even Apollonius is hardly present behind Nonnus's lines. In any case, no better instances can be produced than νόθην ποίησεν ἱμάσθλην (78) cf. *Arg.* 3,871 καὶ εὐποίητον ἱμάσθλην, and ἀνοστήτοιο βερέθρου (104) cf. *Arg.* 2,642 δι᾽ Αἰδαο βερέθρων, 4,1698 μυχάτων ἀνιοῦσα βερέθρων.

Given the anti-Judaism of the early Church, Nonnus's additions to the portrayal of the Jews cannot be expected to be flattering.⁴⁵ Actually he makes them "heavy by the madness of a mind greedy of gain" (86), "throwing up a threatening roar" (91), and cursed with "a rage of unbelief" (114), but since he expresses himself here with the same perfunctory expansions as he does with everything he has to paraphrase, the effect is soporific rather than hurtful.

* * *

⁴¹ Cf. Golega (n. 2) 118.

⁴² For more examples cf. Golega (n. 2) 57, Livrea (n. 3) 61.

⁴³ Cf. Golega (n. 2) 52-6 (Homer), Keydell (n. 41) 250-2 (later poets).

⁴⁴ Cf. Golega (n. 2) 52-6, Keydell (n. 41) 247-52.

⁴⁵ Cf. K. Kuiper, "De Nonno evangelii Johannei interprete", *Mnemosyne* N.S. 46 (1918) 225-70, esp. 230-1, Golega (n. 2) 126-7.

Comparing our results, we find that both poets share a number of characteristics: amplification, a tendency to use a more passionate vocabulary, denigration of Jesus' Jewish adversaries. Their differences, however, are more striking. Some of these seem to be inherent in the Latin and Greek languages respectively. Thus there is a greater morphological and lexical distance between prose and poetry in Greek than in Latin. But Juvencus and Nonnus also have marked differences in approach. Five aspects may be mentioned here.

1. To the detriment of faithfulness but for the benefit of style, Juvencus allows himself to rephrase the sentences of the Gospel text and to omit what he feels to be inconvenient. Nonnus, on the other hand, has the ambition to maintain the syntax of the original, and to suppress no detail of St John's text. Conversely, he feels free to pad out every statement by adjectives, circumlocutions and added details.

2. As a result, Juvencus manages to paraphrase in a great deal less words than Nonnus. The pericope studied takes 24 lines in Juvencus and 52 in Nonnus.

3. Juvencus keeps to the traditional epic—especially Virgilian—stock of words. Nonnus has a good many words unknown outside his own *œuvre*.

4. Juvencus strives to make the classical poets unobtrusively echo in his lines. In Nonnus, reminiscences of earlier literature are much less important.

5. Generally speaking, Juvencus is the more subtle poet. In general, he has the advantage of conciseness. On the other hand, *if* he puts in his ornaments, he does so where they are really effective. Thus John's "in three days" (2,19), which Nonnus routinely renders by ἡμασιν ἐν τρισσοῖσιν, is given by him an expansion evoking the sun pouring its first rosy rays over the awaking earth, a gracious description well fitting the elevation of the speaker, who is Christ. Epithets he cleverly exploits for a contrast: *solvite pollutis manibus uenerabile templum* (166). Finally, he has a much greater gift for visualizing. Paraphrasing John's "money changers sitting" (2,14), in one line he pictures their nervous business:

pars inhians nummis artem numerare uacabat.

Of these six words, four have the ictus on the last syllable and three are verbs; and there is a possible echo of a famous scene in *Aeneid* 4. Nonnus, on the other hand, needs two and a half lines only to inform us that the money changers are for profit, and that they sit and change:

κερμοδότην χορὸν εὔρε φιλοπλούτοιο τραπέζης·
καὶ πολὺν ἔσμον ὅπωπε φιλέμπορον ὑψότι θώκων
ὦνιον ἔργον ἔχοντα.

Here repetitious language with several polysyllabic adjectives denoting qualities, not evoking action; there is no use of metrical or phonological effects, and there are no reminiscences of earlier poetry.

The study of our two poets' procedures, attempted here on a modest scale, offers the rare chance to investigate the methods of authors who want to write epic but at the same time remain faithful to a given parent text still at our disposal. Especially in the case of Nonnus we are privileged in that we can here compare his paraphrase with a second epic poem by the same author, this time written without the constraint of a parent text. The features which may be traced in this way are perhaps not only of interest for Juvenecus and Nonnus, but they may be able to contribute to a more intimate insight into the pursuits of Greek and Latin epic generally.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ I am grateful to Jan den Boeft for his comments on an earlier draft of this paper and to Arjo Vanderjagt for his correcting my English.

AMBROSIUS LYRICUS

by

JAN DEN BOEFT

“They also say that the people have been mesmerized by the poetical force of my hymns. I have no inclination at all to deny that. Great is this poetry and more powerful than anything else, for what could be more powerful than the confession of the Trinity, Which is daily being hailed by the mouth of all the people? They rival one another in the confession of their faith, they know how to praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost in verses. They have all become masters, whereas before they were hardly able to be pupils”.¹

Thus bishop Ambrose in his anti-Arianist sermon on Palm Sunday 386 in the basilica Portiana at Milan.² It is his only statement about his marvellous poetical creation, and fortunately it provides some most welcome information. The passage contains three terms to define this creation: *hymnus* denotes the religious function, *uersus* concerns the ‘technical’ side of the hymns, which are characterized as true lyrical poetry by the word *carmen*.³ The

¹ *Hymnorum quoque meorum carminibus deceptum populum ferunt, plane nec hoc abnuo. Grande carmen istud est quo nihil potentius; quid enim potentius quam confessio trinitatis, quae cottidie totius populi ore celebratur? Certatim omnes student fidem fateri, patrem et filium et spiritum sanctum norunt uersibus praedicare. Facti sunt igitur omnes magistri, qui uix poterant esse discipuli (Epist. 75A,34).* - The long-expected modern edition of Ambrose's hymns was published after I had handed in the definitive version of my manuscript: *Ambroise de Milan, Hymnes. Texte établi, traduit et annoté* sous la direction de J. Fontaine (Paris 1992). From a first study of this invaluable publication I am inclined to conclude that it has no direct implications for the specific point I want to make.

² This is not indisputed. For a discussion of the dates of the *Contra Auxentium* and other relevant Ambrosiana cf. G. Nauroy, “Le fouet et le miel. Le combat d'Ambroise en 386 contre l'arianisme milanais”, *RecAug* 23 (1988) 3-86.

³ I am fully aware of the deliberate ambiguity of *carmen*: in all probability Ambrose alludes to the meaning ‘incantation’, for which TLL III 464,49 ff. provides a long list of instances. This pun, however, can only function if the meaning ‘poetry’ is fully present too. The most adequate Latin word to denote (all

confidence which Ambrose put in these words is remarkable. He seems to regard the psychagogic effect of his hymns as fully in accordance with his aims. The repeated unanimous singing of the orthodox confession, the *fidei canora confessio* (*In ps.* 1,1,9), apparently did not come as a surprise to him. The success, however, could hardly have been taken for granted. Ambrose did not have any model for his hymns in classical mould. The rare data about earlier hymns for liturgical use do not provide anything which can be compared to Ambrose's hymns. Marius Victorinus' prose hymns are in a wholly different class and Hilary's experiments—if that term is not too bold—seem to have had little success, perhaps because his metra were too erudite.⁴

Ambrose took a different course. He availed himself of a metrum which as such was not unknown, the acatalectic iambic dimeter, which in principle consists of eight syllables. It had been used in Latin poetry either in combination with other metra, e.g. in some of Horace's *Epodes* and in Seneca's *Medea* 771-86, or in a stichic scheme, as in Seneca's *Agamemnon* 759-74, in Ausonius' *Epist.* 12 and in some *carmina epigraphica*. It had not been employed frequently and ancient treatises on metrical matters pay little attention to it. It is thus difficult to single out its precise status.⁵ Having chosen this metre, Ambrose handled it according to quite severe standards: he observed the rules of prosody, i.e. the second and fourth feet are pure iambs, while in the first and third feet spondees are the most usual substitution. This thoroughly classical pattern was, however, modernized by its being used in a stanzaic structure. Such a structure is one of the

sorts of) poetry is indeed *carmen*: see the list in TLL III 466,5-467,10. For the earlier Christian use of *hymnus* cf. A.A.R. Bastiaensen, "Psalmi, hymni and cantica in early Jewish-Christian tradition", *SP* 21 (1989) 15-26.

⁴ See now for the hymns of Marius Victorinus and Hilary, *Handbuch der lateinischen Literatur der Antike V: Restauration und Erneuerung. Die lateinische Literatur von 284 bis 374 n. Chr.* (Handbuch der Altertumswissenschaft 8,5; München 1989) ed. R. Herzog, § 564c (Madec) and § 582d (Doignon) respectively. Only three of Hilary's hymns have been preserved, none of them completely. In the first an alternation of mostly glyconeï and minor asclepiadeans is used, the second is in iambic senarii and the third in trochaic septenarii.

⁵ Although rather dated, Th. Gaisford, *Scriptores Latini rei metricae* (Oxford 1837) is quite handy for quick consultation. I am not convinced that *uolucripes dimetria* (Ausonius *Epist.* 12,104) implies that Ausonius considers the iambic dimeter as "la forme raffinée la plus appropriée à la frivolité mondaine" (J. Fontaine, *Naissance de la poésie dans l'occident chrétien* [Paris 1981] 138 n. 229). The adjective refers to the swiftness of iambic metre: cf. *citios iambicos* (Prudentius *Epil.* 7), which obviously is not referring to any frivolity. See further P. Klopsch, *Einführung in die mittellateinische Verslehre* (Darmstadt 1972) 8-16.

characteristics of much ancient lyrical poetry. Perhaps Ambrose's choice of the iambic dimeter was influenced by the large part the glyconeus played in the asclepiadean stanzas. The glyconeus also consists of 8 syllables and its second half is quite similar to the iambic dimeter.⁶

The immediate success, which did not take the poet by surprise, was shown by the frequency of imitation, which had as its consequence the ascription of a large number of hymns to Ambrose, the indication 'ambrosian hymn' almost becoming a generic name. A process of critical sifting thus became necessary. This was started in 1862 by Biraghi, who, among other criteria, required the continuous presence of a particular hymn in the Milanese liturgy, and continued by Dreves (1893), who endeavoured to make the characteristics of Ambrose's metre and style more explicit. The 'canon' constituted by Biraghi and Dreves contained eighteen hymns, which were thoroughly examined by Steier as to similarities to the language and style of Ambrose's prose writings. This resulted in a rich supply of parallels, which were put to good use in the comments by Walpole, who read Ambrose's *œuvre* himself too.⁷ Contrary to Steier,⁸ Walpole accepted the four 'incomplete' hymns, which do not contain the usual eight stanzas, but only four or two.

All these endeavours were deemed unsatisfactory by Simonetti, who devoted a considerable part of his large study of ancient Christian hymns to the authenticity of the eighteen hymns attributed to Ambrose.⁹ Like his predecessors he took as his base the four hymns the authenticity of which is testified to by contemporary references: *Aeternae rerum conditor, Deus creator omnium, Iam surgit hora tertia, Veni redemptor gentium*.¹⁰ In studying the text and

⁶ The metrical schemes are $\underline{\text{u}} - / \text{u} - / \underline{\text{u}} - / \text{u} -$ for the iambic dimeter and $- - / - \text{u} \text{u} - / \text{u} -$ (*sic te diua potens Cypri*, Horace C. 1,3,1) for the glyconeus. Cf. also Fontaine 1981 (n. 5) 138.

⁷ L. Biraghi, *Inni sinceri e carmi di Sant'Ambrogio, vescovo di Milano* (Milano 1862); G.M. Dreves, *Aurelius Ambrosius, "der Vater des Kirchengesanges"* (Freiburg 1893); A. Steier, "Untersuchungen über die Echtheit der Hymnen des Ambrosius", *Jahrbücher für classische Philologie*, 28. Supplementband (Leipzig 1903) 551-662; A.S. Walpole, *Early Latin Hymns* (Cambridge 1922) 16-114.

⁸ "Man ist aber wohl gerechtiht, für einen Hymnus, der von Ambrosius gedichtet sein soll, die Zahl von acht Strophen zu je vier Versen zu verlangen" (Steier 1903 [n. 7] 640).

⁹ M. Simonetti, "Studi sull'innologia popolare cristiana dei primi secoli", *Atti della Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei*, Anno CCCXLIX (1952), Serie ottava, Memorie, Classe di Scienze morali, storiche e filologiche, Vol. IV, 339-484.

¹⁰ Augustine *Retr.* 1,21, *Conf.* 9,32, *Nat. et grat.* 63, S. 372,4,3.

structure of these hymns Simonetti developed a definition of Ambrose's 'usus scribendi'. Its most distinct characteristics are a certain syntactic autonomy of the individual verses and an elegant alternation of symmetry and chiasmus in the arrangement of subject, predicate and object. Having thus provided himself with a relatively easy standard, Simonetti next put the collection to the test, which resulted in the acceptance of nine, possibly eleven pieces, and the unconditional rejection of the authenticity of the four short hymns and three hymns of normal length.¹¹ Simonetti's judgement is open to challenge, if only because of his underestimation of Steier's material, but a discussion of these matters is not the object of this paper. I am primarily concerned with the undoubted progress in the study of Ambrose's poetry which is the result of Simonetti's elucidation of his professional skill. Many people might be able to write a reasonable text which in a satisfactory way tallies with the strict rules used by the bishop, but more is needed to earn the predicate 'poetry'.¹²

In the following Ambrose's poetical *ars* will be illustrated by some examples. First a few instances from Simonetti's large collection. He praises the "simmetria variata" in the first stanza of the 'hymn of the cock':

Aeterne rerum conditor,
noctem diemque qui regis,
et temporum das tempora,
ut alleues fastidium.

The order object-predicate in vs. 2 is followed by predicate-object in vs. 3. In the first stanza of *Deus creator omnium* there is a "perfetta concinnitas" in vss. 3 and 4, where day and night in their exact parallelism are both dependent on the isolated *uestiens* in vs. 2:

Deus creator omnium,
polique rector, uestiens
diem decoro lumine,
noctem soporis gratia.

Because they are put in a series, observations of this type contribute to the understanding of the hymns as skilfully composed poetry. In any case they emphasize the importance of an artistic

¹¹ *Amore Christi nobilis, Apostolorum supparem, Illuminans altissimus* (Simonetti 1952 [n. 9] 413).

¹² The understanding of Ambrose's hymns as specimens of poetry has been considerably furthered by the relevant chapters in D. Norberg, *Au seuil du moyen âge* (Padova 1974) 135-49, and J. Fontaine 1981 (n. 5) 127-41.

arrangement of the words, which beside the choice of the individual words shapes the elusive, but unmistakable appearance of true poetical language.

The *callida iunctura* commended by Horace has, however, more potential than is broached by Simonetti. Some further examples may illustrate this. In vs. 3 of *Aeterne rerum conditor* the alternating succession of times is not indicated by e.g. the substantive *uicis*,¹³ but by a most efficiently used polyptoton, which by its twofold use of the plural of *tempus* emphasizes the multiple temporariness of creation, in contrast to the uniform eternity of the Creator. The first stanza of *Deus creator omnium* is elegantly concluded by *gratia*, an ambiguous term which can express both the attractive charm of sleep and God's gracious gift of it. More interesting is *uestiens*, which can be regarded as a case of 'foregrounding'.¹⁴ The poet reaches outside the usual range of options the language user has at his disposal with a significant deviation: God does not provide the day with light, but 'clothes' or 'swathes' it therein. Possibly Ambrose was inspired by the phrase in Virgil's *Aeneid* 6,640-1 (*largior hic campos aether et lumine uestit/ purpureo*), but this does not detract anything from his fine artistry in the hymn, nor do the parallels in his prose-writings. Skilful *imitatio* does not deprive a word or expression of its force, but rather gives it fresh splendour. Moreover, the 'poetic' colouring of Ambrose's prose has been observed and explained by several scholars, among whom Fontaine and Lazzati take the prime place.¹⁵

Two further examples. In the second stanza of the hymn in honour of Victor, Nabor and Felix the heat in the far-away country of their extraction, Mauretania, is expressed in a striking manner by

¹³ Cf. *tempora autem quae sunt nisi mutationum uices?* (Ambrose *Hex.* 4,5,21). Prudentius uses *uicis* in a phrase expressing the same idea: *qui certis uicibus tempora diuidis* (*Cath.* 5,2).

¹⁴ Cf. G.N. Leech, *A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry* (London 1976⁵) ch. 4, "Foregrounding and Interpretation" (56-72). Foregrounding can imply "deviations from linguistic or other socially accepted norms" (57). Cf. also *A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms* ed. R. Fowler (London 1987²) 97-8. A survey of the development of the relevant theories and the different forms of foregrounding is provided in W. van Peer, *Stylistics and Psychology. Investigations of Foregrounding* (London 1986) 1-26. In view of the limited scope of this paper it seemed less opportune to introduce the other main stylistic device belonging to the domain of foregrounding, parallelism.

¹⁵ J. Fontaine, "Prose et poésie: l'interférence des genres et des styles dans la création littéraire d'Ambroise de Milan", in id., *Études sur la poésie latine tardive d'Ausone à Prudence* (Paris 1980) 84-130; G. Lazzati, *Il valore letterario della esegesi ambrosiana* (Milano 1960).

torrens harena quos dedit,
anhela solis aestubus.

In this passage another case of foregrounding, *anhela*, makes this heat almost physically present. Again the poet's competence causes the reader to experience the deviation from more common use of language as significant. Buchheit's remark that this is a specimen of the reversal of the rhetorical *laus patriae*¹⁶ is not incorrect from a philological point of view, but it neglects the poetical efficiency of the phrase. Finally, to conclude this section, in the martyrs' hymn *Aeterna Christi munera* vss. 11-12 have this to say about the martyrs:

mortis sacrae compendio
lucem beatam possident.

Here the choice of *compendium* deserves attention. Placed behind *mortis sacrae*, it somewhat surprisingly reveals that these words are a genitivus explicativus, the whole expression being an almost laconic example of the well-known idea that the martyr is granted the heavenly good immediately after death, which is a short route sparing him all detours. Quite remarkable is *lucem* instead of *uitam*, which is metrically equivalent to it and which would have been wholly in place after *mortis*. Ambrose's technique does not need spectacular means! Why did he choose *lucem*? Presumably as an echo of the final verse of the preceding stanza, in which the martyrs are called (*et*) *uera mundi lumina*. Their blessed abode must be in the light. It may, however, well be that the undeniable enrichment in comparison to the expected *uitam*¹⁷ has a further reaching purport.

Up to this point we have dealt with the competent and strict observance of metrical rules and next with the artistic choice and arrangement of words. Both testify to the bishop's poetical know-how. All the same, they remain somewhat on the outside, so to speak, being confined to the formal aspects. Without doubt the relation between form and content is not of the kind of a box and its ingredients. Form cannot be separated from content, indeed it is an indissoluble part of content. The instances which were quoted already illustrated this fundamental insight. Nevertheless,

¹⁶ V. Buchheit, "Militia Christi und Triumph des Märtyrers", in *Kontinuität und Wandel. Lateinische Poesie von Naevius bis Baudelaire. Franco Munari zum 65. Geburtstag* ed. U.J. Stache, W. Maaz, F. Wagner (Berlin 1986) 273-89, esp. 273-4.

¹⁷ The phrase *uitam beatam* occurs in vs. 16 of the hymn *Hic est dies uerus dei*.

in analyzing a text one can distinguish the formal aspects from the message intended by the writer. After all, it is possible to translate or paraphrase any text with some degree of success, although especially in the case of lyrical poetry the danger of 'traduttore traditore' can hardly be avoided altogether. Obviously, in this type of poetry words and content are even more closely bound up with one another. Unfortunately antiquity has left us no real treatment of the specific characteristics of lyrical poetry. The greatest lyrical poet of the Romans does not really study the subject in his well-known poetic essay. In fact, in accordance with the traditions of ancient literary theory the *Ars Poetica* is primarily concerned with epic and drama.

It will thus be necessary to turn to modern discussions and examinations of the subject, but it is not easy to find models which can be profitably used to gain a better understanding of Ambrose's poetry. Those explanations which abound in terms that express spontaneity and subjectivity and allot a leading role to the emotions¹⁸ are too vague and moreover not quite suitable for the study of ancient lyrical poetry, which tends to control the expression of feelings by thoughtful ordering. Horace's *carmina* show this very clearly in the often recurring tendency of the poetical subject to subordinate personal thoughts to the care for the welfare of the community. There are no indications that Ambrose was directly influenced by Horace, but it would seem that precisely in this respect he shows a certain congeniality with the Augustan poet. Of course, Ambrose's choral lyric first and foremost looks to biblical truth as understood from an orthodox point of view, whereas Horace was inspired by the revival of sound Roman principles. Moreover, Horace's poetry testifies to the ideas and ideals of an individual who wants to function as a member of the community and Ambrose's hymns are specimina of choral lyric in its truest form in that they are composed to be sung by the whole community. Still, both types of lyrical poetry differ from modern forms which have entailed the definitions touched on above.

There are, however, modern studies of lyrical poetry which are less exclusively concentrated on contemporary or relatively recent texts. One of these is Walther Killy's *Elemente der Lyrik*,¹⁹ from which I venture to choose two 'elements'. First "Kürze", the sub-

¹⁸ A quotation from the often most enlightening *Dictionary of Literary Terms* by J.A. Cuddon (Penguin Books 1982) may serve as an example: "... usually expresses the thoughts and feelings of a single speaker (not necessarily the poet himself) in a personal and subjective fashion".

¹⁹ München 1972².

ject of the last chapter. This does not merely refer to the limited size of most lyrical poems or to the artistic economy of the poet who does not spend a word too much, but above all to the meaningful compactness of the text. This can be regarded as a kind of abbreviation which the listener or reader has to solve. Killy illustrates his exposition with instances taken from both modern and ancient poetry, so that in using his findings to further the understanding of passages in Ambrose's hymns the interpreter does not act in a revolutionary way.

Two hymns are directly paralleled by prose writings: *Aeterne rerum conditor* bears a strong similarity to the passage devoted to the cock in *Hex.* 5,88 and the hymn of thanksgiving on the occasion of the discovery of the remains of the martyrs Protasius and Gervasius is continually reminiscent of *Epist.* 77, in which the bishop tells his sister Marcellina about this remarkable episode. Two sermons are summarized in this account. In the report on the former of these Ambrose broaches the subject of the healings which had taken place: *Cognouistis immo uidistis ipsi multos a daemoniis purgatos, plurimos etiam ubi uestem sanctorum manibus contigerunt his quibus laborabant debilitatibus absolutos, reparata uetusti temporis miracula, quo se per aduentum domini Iesu gratia terris maior infuderat, umbra quadam sanctorum corporum plerosque sanatos cernitis* (*Epist.* 77,9). The words *cognouistis immo uidistis ... reparata uetusti temporis miracula* express that the audience had witnessed the revival of the miracles of the time when Jesus walked the earth and of those wrought by the apostles. In the lyrical language of the hymn this returns at the beginning of the last stanza: *uetusta saecula uidimus*. At first sight this seems a mere abridgement of the prose text, called for by the limits of the metre. On reflection, however, it appears to be not a shortened version of the same text, but rather an intensification of its contents. In his sermon the bishop reminded his congregation that they had seen miracles repeating those of biblical times; in the hymn the congregation follows the lyrical poet in singing that it had experienced, lived through, indeed 'seen' those times. The poet promotes this way of seeing by the phrases immediately preceding and following the remarkable *uetusta saecula uidimus*:

soluta turba uinculis,
spiris draconum libera,
emissa totis urbibus
domum redit cum gratia.

uetusta saecula uidimus,
iactata semicinctia,
tactuque et umbra corporum
aegris salutem redditam. (vss. 25-32)

Vss. 27-8, the contents of which have no parallel in *Epist.* 77, are an allusion to Acts 5,16, where it is told that people from neighbouring towns flocked to Jerusalem, bringing their sick to be healed by the apostles. The term *semicinctia* (30) recalls Acts 19,12, where it is used to denote the aprons which, having touched Paul's body, proved to have healing power.²⁰ Thus the phrase under discussion has far more significance than its prose parallel. It is not just a fine specimen of a strict handling of the iambic dimeter, but the truly lyrical expression of an unforgettable experience. It would do less than justice to the text to say that its concise formula is required by the metre. It is rather the other way round. Here lyrical "Kürze" calls for a compact metre, and form and content are combined in an indissoluble whole. In spite of all differences in theme and thought the affinity with Horace's *carmina* shines through.

In his first chapter Killy deals with the frequent introduction of nature into lyrical poems. Nature is evoked and handled in terms of human experience and feelings, more or less as a personification, which in turn can illuminate human emotions and thoughts. This should be distinguished from descriptions in narrative texts of the scenery or the background of the actions which are narrated, even if such a passage abounds in 'pathetic fallacy', and from explicit comparisons with elements chosen from nature. In lyrical poetry nature manifests itself directly, but in a way which widely differs from everyday perception.²¹ In Ambrose's *gallicinium*-hymn *Aeterne rerum conditor* this characteristic of lyrical poetry of all time is present too:

hoc excitatus lucifer
soluit polum caligine. (9-10)

²⁰ Cf. J. den Boeft, "*Vetusta saecula uidimus*: Ambrose's Hymn on Protasius and Gervasius", *Eulogia. Mélanges A.A.R. Bastiaensen*, ed. G.J.M. Bartelink – A. Hilhorst – C.H. Kneepkens (Steenbrugis–The Hague 1991) 65-75.

²¹ Cf. from a somewhat different viewpoint: "Alles Seiende vielmehr ist in der Stimmung nicht Gegenstand, sondern Zustand. Zuständlichkeit ist die Seinsart von Mensch und Natur in der lyrischen Poesie" (E. Staiger, *Grundbegriffe der Poetik* [München 1971] 46) and K. Hamburger, *Die Logik der Dichtung* (Stuttgart 1968²) 187-232 ("Die Lyrische Gattung"). In this chapter the author elucidates the "Erlebnis" of the lyrical subject, concluding "daß seine Aussage sich nicht auf den Objektpol richtet, sondern ihr Objekt in die Erlebnisphäre des Subjekts hineinzieht und damit verwandelt" (232).

The cock awakens the sleeping morning-star, which then illuminates the sky. Now it is interesting that this lyrical evocation of day-break can be directly compared to the prose text in *Hex.* 5,88: *hoc ipse lucifer excitatus oritur caelumque inluminat*.²² The first words are almost the same as those in the hymn, but then the sentence is continued in a 'normal', prosaic manner with *oritur caelumque inluminat*, 'rises and lights up the sky'. In the poem, however, the morning-star 'liberates the firmament from darkness'. To observe that Ambrose avails himself of reminiscences from classical poetry is not incorrect, but insufficient. Neither is it important as such that the poetic phrase can be regarded as an artistically successful specimen of foregrounding. It should rather be noticed that it expresses a wholly different perception of one of the most elementary phenomena of nature, a perception which is steered by human experience. In the sequel of the text the meaning of this lyrical way of perceiving becomes fully clear, when the voice of the same cock that awakened the morning-star brings about the awakening from spiritual sleep:

gallus iacentes excitat
et somnolentos increpat. (18-19)

Those who are awakened will after the example of Peter be saved from darkness when Christ turns and looks upon them. In the crowing of the cock the voice of Christ himself, who as Creator has the cock at his disposal, can be heard. This voice removes the darkness of the human heart and announces its day-break: *tu lux refulge sensibus* (28).

There are other chapters and viewpoints in Killy's book which contain 'elements' which can prove to be most fruitful when pondering Ambrose's hymns, such as "Allegorie" or "Stimmung", but it is now more opportune to add one further dimension to our examination. Up till now, in a succession of increasing importance, three aspects of Ambrose's successful poetry have been singled out and discussed: correct use of a well-chosen metre, artistry in the arrangement of words and finally some characteristics of lyrical poetry *qua talis*. Ambrose's poetry, however, could only be composed and could only function within a very specific space, both in a literal and a metaphorical sense. For him reality was not autonomous, it was God's creation and as such a pluri-

²² Cf. P. Siniscalco, "Linguaggio della poesia e linguaggio della prosa: un esempio fortunato in Ambrogio di Milano", in *Polyanthema. Studi di Letteratura cristiana antica offerti a S. Costanza* (Studi Tardoantichi 7; Messina 1989) I, 151-65.

form reference to another reality which is not directly accessible to the senses. In his *œuvre* there are more passages testifying to this conviction, but perhaps the following is the clearest: ... *rerum uisibilibus summa caelum et terra est, quae non solum ad mundi huius spectare uidentur ornatum, sed etiam ad indicium rerum inuisibilium et quoddam argumentum eorum quae non uidentur* ... (Hex. 1,16). Heaven and earth and all visible things within them are not only meant as an embellishment of this universe,²³ but also as a sign of that which cannot be seen. This view, this manner of perceiving reality is also put into words by other patristic authors,²⁴ but in Ambrose's poetry it manifests itself as directly as can be imagined. It explains the reason why the same cock who heralded the light of day-break can also remove the darkness from the heart of Peter and all the other fallen faithful. The lyrical perception of nature as the reflection of human experience is sustained by the conviction that all things have been made by the eternal Creator, Who has ordained that the material things which we perceive refer to and are directed at the immaterial aspects of creation, and Who has linked the phenomena of nature by an indissoluble bond to the great facts of salvation and to man's corresponding faith.

An excellent illustration of this is provided in Ambrose's explanation of Ps. 45,5, "God will help her (= the city of God) at the break of day":

Sequitur: 'adiuuabit eam deus diluculo, quo significatur, quia resurrectio matutina adiumentorum nobis caelestium subsidia confert, quae noctem reppulit, diem refudit dicente scriptura 'surge qui dormis et exurge a mortuis, et inlucescit tibi Christus'. Vide autem mysterium. Vespere passus est Christus; ideo et secundum legem ad uesperam agnus occiditur. Mane resurrexit; sic enim scriptum est: 'una autem sabbati uenit Maria Magdalene prima luce ad monumentum, cum adhuc esset obscurum, et uidit lapidem amotum ab ostio'. Ad uesperam mundi occiditur deficiente iam luce, quia in tenebris erat hic totus mundus et maioribus fuisset tenebrarum squaloribus inuolutus, nisi Christus nobis e caelo lux aeterna uenisset innocentiae tempora generi refusus humano. Passus est ergo dominus Iesus et sanguine suo nostra peccata donauit, lux refulsit conscientiae purioris et dies resplenduit gratiae spiritalis; unde et apostolus ait: 'nox praecessit, dies appropin-

²³ Ambrose refers to the well-known word-play on the different meanings of κόσμος ('ornament' and 'ordered universe'), of which Plato *Tim.* 40a-b is one of the earliest examples. Cf. also Cicero *N.D.* 2,58 and Pease's note ad ib. 1,22.

²⁴ Cf. Chr. Gnllka, "Die Natursymbolik in den Tagesliedern des Prudentius", in *Pietas. Festschrift für B. Kötting*, ed. E. Dassmann—K.S. Frank (*JbAC Ergänzungsband* 8; Münster 1980) 411-46.

quauit'. Euigilauius igitur, iam non dormiamus; uestem lucis induimus, non in amictus tenebrosae conuersationis atque exuuias reuertamur; comessationibus atque deliciis, quae nocturni sunt temporis, uale diximus, sobrietatem elegimus, cuius gratia Iacob primatus quos non habebat inuenit. (*In ps.* 45,14)

In this passage it is made clear that Christ's suffering and resurrection are structurally bound to particular moments in the course of the day: *uespere passus est ... mane resurrexit*, indeed that these cardinal facts could only take place at those moments, in view of God's arrangement of time. For the understanding of this and comparable passages models like metaphor or allegory are wholly unsatisfactory. Even an explanation of *ad uesperam mundi occiditur deficiente iam luce*, in which 'analogy' is the main key, leaves something to be desired, because it implies a distance which in fact does not exist in the idea put forward by the text. Although modern man is inclined to analytical thinking, in order to understand Ambrose's poetry it will be necessary to transport oneself mentally to a way of thinking in which the unity of nature and salvation is essential.²⁵ Otherwise it will be almost impossible to grasp the formidable start of the hymn of the cross:

Iam surgit hora tertia,
qua Christus ascendit crucem;
nil insolens mens cogitet,
intendat affectum precis.

The predicate *ascendit* is ambiguous: as a perfect tense it expresses the uniqueness of the crucifixion as a historical fact, and taken as a present it words the spiritual reiteration of the event at the hour which, as appears from Mark 15,25, has been structurally fixed by God. This ambiguity entails that the first two verses are the self-evident, indeed the 'natural' base for the appeal to assume a disposition of true devotion. Here again Ambrose's poetry is akin to the lyrical poetry of all time, in which an overwhelming event or experience in the past can come to life in the perception and the words of the poet. But in his case this takes place

²⁵ The seventh stanza of the morning hymn *Splendor paternae gloriae* indeed contains some explicit comparisons of Christian 'virtues' with the times of the day:

pudor sit ut diluculum,
fides uelut meridies. (26-7)

Even those comparisons, however, can only be fully understood against the background of God's functional creation and arrangement of time(s).

within the space and inner coherence of God's creation.²⁶

Only within such a framework the remarkable poetic gifts of the learned churchman could fully expand. He did not compose beautiful songs which were gratifying to the ears, but authentic poetry which could move men's hearts. Small wonder that in his bitter grief for the death of his mother²⁷ Augustine found consolation in the memory of the hymn *Deus creator omnium*, small wonder that the faithful in the basilica Portiana were mesmerized: they sang²⁸ about their orthodox faith in the Trinity, not with dogmatic formulae which had been put into metre by a prelate, but in the wonderful lyrical stanzas of a poet: *grande carmen istud est quo nihil potentius*.²⁹

²⁶ Cf. Staiger 1971 (n. 21) 42: "Vergangenes als Gegenstand einer Erzählung gehört dem Gedächtnis an. Vergangenes als Thema des Lyrischen ist ein Schatz der Erinnerung". A comparable instance of such ambiguity is present in *quo diluit sanguis sacer* in the first stanza of the hymn *Hic est dies uerus dei*. For an interpretation of that hymn cf. G. Bernt, "Ambrosius von Mailand: 'Hic est dies uerus Dei'. Ein patristischer Paschahymnus", in *Liturgie und Dichtung. Ein interdisziplinäres Kompendium* ed. H. Becker - R. Kaczynski (St. Ottilien 1983) I 509-46.

²⁷ Augustine *Conf.* 9,32.

²⁸ For community singing during the liturgy, cf. J. Schmitz, *Gottesdienst im altchristlichen Mailand* (Theophaneia 25, Köln - Bonn 1975) 303-315.

²⁹ I thank Annelies Kruijshoop, Will van Peer and Sytze Wiersma for their most helpful advice.

THE FUNCTION OF BIBLICAL MATERIAL IN THE HYMNS OF ST. AMBROSE

by

M.J. MANS

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the pastoral achievements for which St. Ambrose (ca. 339-397), bishop of Milan (374-397), is most famous is his creation of Christian hymns which he wrote for congregational purposes.¹ His rhetorical style, even in these hymns, was rich in imagery derived from nature, Scripture, and classical sources, such as Virgil and Cicero.² Although Hilary of Poitiers is credited with being the first to introduce liturgical hymns in the Latin language into the West, Ambrose developed the genre into a simple, highly poetic form, in order to capture the imagination of his congregation, and to communicate particular evangelical messages, thereby making it a very popular and useful medium. Because of this one can justifiably define him as the father of liturgical hymnody in the Western church.³ The real history of ancient Latin Christian hymns in the West, therefore, begins with St. Ambrose.

After the Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325), with Christianity enter-

¹ I chose the text edition of Walther Bulst, *Hymni Latini Antiquissimi LXXV Psalmi III* (Heidelberg 1956). Additional sources consulted: Marion M. van Assendelft, *Sol ecce surgit igneus. A commentary on the morning and evening hymns of Prudentius* (Groningen 1976); G. van der Leeuw, "Gallicinium. De haan in de oudste hymnen der westersche Kerk", *Mededeelingen der Nederlandsche Akademie van Wetenschappen* N.R. 4, Afdeeling Letterkunde (Amsterdam 1941) 833-52; A.J. Wensinck, *Tree and bird as cosmological symbols in Western Asia* (Verhandelingen der Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen te Amsterdam, Afdeeling Letterkunde, N.R. 22,1, Amsterdam 1921).

² R.E. Messenger, "The Classical influence in the Hymns of St Ambrose", *Classical Folia* 4 (1949) 5-9; Louis J. Swift, "Ambrose", in *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity* ed. Everett Ferguson (New York 1990) 30-1.

³ Swift 1990 (n. 2) 30-1; F.J.E. Raby, *A History of Christian-Latin Poetry from the Beginnings to the Close of the Middle Ages* (Oxford 1927) 32 and 41-2.

ing the Constantinian period, the changing task of the church and its exegesis emphasized the need for providing a solid biblical basis for specific answers to the contemporary Trinitarian and Christological problems, which had been formulated mostly in nonbiblical terms. In this regard St. Ambrose effectively used his hymns not only to propagate, but also to defend the Trinitarian concept against the Arians (especially the relationship of Christ to the Father), and the Christological truths. From the fourth century onwards, theological and pastoral orientation of patristic commentaries influenced the church, and consequently, of course, also St. Ambrose in his hymn writing, to use the biblical texts in service of orthodox doctrine, moral instruction, theological discovery, and spiritual guidance.⁴

Influenced by Philo and Origen in his writings, St. Ambrose accepted a threefold interpretation of the scriptural text, i.e. literal, moral, and allegorical/mystical/eschatological.⁵

In line with traditional practice, St. Ambrose uses biblical material in his hymns to interpret biblical events or particular biblical figures. In his interpretation he implements the above mentioned material to illustrate, or prove specific ideas. The material as employed by our hymnographer, however, more often than not lends itself to more than one function. St. Ambrose shared the classical heritage as part of his environment, and was a true Roman by birth and learning.⁶ In part he used this inheritance in the application of scriptural material to encourage the imitation of biblical examples,⁷ and to exhort the application of eternal values. In addition it also provided useful information for supporting his arguments, while didactically it furnished him with applicable warnings, meant for the true believer, of what to avoid in his religious life. This classical inheritance also facilitated instruction and enabled our hymnographer to teach his audience eternal values and biblical truths. It will become clear from this study that the conventional conception in patristic literature of biblical material as being mainly used for imitation, is challenged by the variety of additional functions revealed by St. Ambrose's liturgical employment of this material in his hymns.

The purpose of this study is to concentrate on some examples in this regard that occur in the hymns of St. Ambrose, to indicate

⁴ Swift 1990 (n. 2) 30-1.

⁵ Swift 1990 (n. 2) 30.

⁶ Messenger 1949 (n. 1) 5; Raby 1927 (n. 2) 35.

⁷ Cf. H. Lausberg, *Handbuch der literarischen Rhetorik* (München 1960) 227-35, par. 410-26.

how he employs Holy Scripture in his hymns, in other words, how in his treatment of the latter he implements, recasts and adapts his biblical sources.

2. SOME EXAMPLES IN THE HYMNS OF ST. AMBROSE

2.1. *Aeterne rerum conditor*

2.1.1. *The gallus*

The crowing of the cock, a symbol derived from nature and Scripture, implicitly warns and reminds the congregation of the Lord's second coming, and is also employed to emphasize and prove how salutary and redemptive the effect of Christ's summons really can be in the life of a sinner who listens to His call. This metaphor is mainly taken from the following four biblical intertexts: Matt. 26,69-75; Mark 14,66-72; Luke 22,56-62; John 18,17-18.25-7. St. Ambrose, however, in his application of this material deviates noticeably from the Scriptural intention, according to which the cock only serves to remind Peter of Christ's prophetic words which, of course, finally bring him to contrition. Our poet's implementation of the *gallus* symbol, as will be indicated below, should rather be seen in the light of the eschatological alignment of the *gallicinium*, for which this particular hymn was written, and in accordance with Mark 13,35-6: "Be on guard, then, because you do not know when the master of the house is coming—it might be in the evening or at midnight or at cock crow or at sunrise. If he comes suddenly, he must not find you asleep."

The first image implemented in strophe 2 to symbolize the cock as *praeco diei*, the herald of daylight, is extended and elaborated in the rest of the hymn. It soon becomes evident that the Light of Eternal Life and the darkness of Sin, from a Christian perspective, is actually the spiritualization of the physical antithesis, day and night, already appearing in the very first strophe of this hymn, and is therefore of paramount importance as far as the symbolism of the crowing of the cock is concerned. All the evidence suggests that the crowing of the cock here should be seen as a symbol of Christ's summons. Thus the cock, by crowing, announces daylight, i.e. the dawn of Life Everlasting, to man, and is a symbol of Christ who calls man to Eternal Life.

The cock's watchfulness throughout the depth of night, refer-

red to by our hymnographer in verse 6 of the second strophe, immediately reminds Christians, of course, of Christ, our Protector, who is always awake, and, in the words of the psalmist, as the Protector of Israel, "never dozes or sleeps".⁸

The reassuring expulsion of darkness by the brightness of daylight and the termination of evil and sin is causatively linked by St. Ambrose to the sound of the cock's crow. This is effectively illustrated in the third strophe:

The morning star at his note
frees the vault of heaven from its gloom,
when he crows, the entire host of roving demons
abandons⁹ the paths of their harmful evil-doing.

The poet extends the influence of the crowing of the cock in strophe 4 when he adds, in consolation of the congregation, that the sailor, when hearing its call, regains his strength, and the waves of the storm (a reference perhaps to the sinner's stormy life) subside. The first half of the hymn (precisely four strophes), reaches a climax here at the turning point of the hymn as a whole, in that Peter, the Church's rock himself, washed away his guilt with his tears while the cock was crowing. Once again it is clear that Christ is suggested here, since the cock obviously does not have the power in itself to let this happen.

In strophe 5 the clarion call of the cock (as the symbol of Christ) comes to the believer with the urgent summons to get up from his sleep, i.e. his spiritual sleep of sin.¹⁰ The voice of Christ (i.e. the crowing of the cock) awakens the lie-a-beds, spurs on the drowsy, convicts those that refuse His request and deny Him. Strophes 5 and 6 of this hymn clearly, and didactically convey to us that the *gallus* is not an example to be followed as such, but rather reminds us of Christ's second coming and the dawn of Eternal Life. It therefore rather serves as a paraenesis or warning to the Christian to rise promptly in order to be ready for His return. The admonition in Mark 13,36: "If he (i.e. the master of the house) comes suddenly, he must not find you asleep" is strikingly relevant here. In strophe 6 another climax is reached when the extensively worked out image of the cock brings home the consolatory and reassuring message, and effectively exemplifies how

⁸ Ps. 121,3-5.

⁹ I.e. for the duration of daylight. Only with the second coming of Christ would the devil and demons be finally destroyed (Justin 1 *Apol.* 45 and 52).

¹⁰ Eph. 5,14.

Christ (personified in the clarion call of the cock) can really bring about a change for the better in the life of the sinner: e.g. the returning of hope, restoration of health, termination of crime and sin, and the return of the fallen persons' faith.¹¹

From the above treatment of the crowing of the cock, it is therefore evident that the cock is a personification of Christ. In no less than five strophes (2-6), the cock, in fact, more specifically the crowing of the cock, is spiritualized to become a symbol of Christ and His summons.

The *gallus* can be singled out as a biblical reflection that apparently lends itself to serve in an instructive and didactic way not only as a warning reminder, but also as a consolation to the true believer.

2.1.2. *Peter's denial of Christ*

The Peter figure, verses 15-16 of strophe 4, in which the true believers are not only reminded of Peter's denial of Christ, but the purification from guilt by means of contrition is also held before us as an example worthy of following, is based, of course, on the following chapters of the first three Gospels: Matthew 26,75; Mark 14,66-72, and Luke 22,60-2 where Peter's contrition is forcefully expressed. The reflection of this incident, employed in the fourth strophe, occurs in the penultimate strophe of this hymn. Here the implicit look of the Lord and suggested tears of Peter, emanating from the reference to Peter in strophe 4, are exemplified and applied in the hymnographer's rendering (strophe 7), first, in the form of an urgent plea that the Lord must look reprimandingly at the fallen, and secondly, as a result of Christ's look at us sinners, in the assurance that our backslidings will fall from us, and that by shedding tears of contrition our guilt is paid for. It is precisely the latter application of Peter, i.e. the analogous shedding of tears of contrition, bringing about redemption of guilt, that St. Ambrose uses so successfully and effectively in his communication with his congregation, influencing his audience's feelings and conduct. In strophe 4, Peter's penitential shedding of tears resulting in himself washing away his guilt, an unthinkable and impossible act,

¹¹ On this point cf. K. Thraede, "‘Und alsbald krächte der Hahn’—der Morgenhymnus des Ambrosius von Mailand", in *Hauptwerke der Literatur* (Vortragsreihe der Universität Regensburg 17; Regensburg 1990) 35-47, esp. 41 and 42-4; cf. W. Fauth, "Der Morgenhymnus Aeternae rerum conditor des Ambrosius und Prudentius Cath. 1 (Ad galli cantum)", *JbAC* 27-28 (1984-5) 97-115, esp. 112.

of course, without the redemptive power of Jesus Christ, suggests the reprimanding look and presence of Christ, though Christ, who, as Luke reports, turned around in the courtyard and looked at Peter, is not even mentioned here in the fourth strophe, but surely was directly involved in Peter's contrition and eventual redemption of guilt. Apparently our hymnographer has sound cause not to include Christ in his poetical flash-back of the denial scene in the first half of the hymn, but to bring Him explicitly to the fore in the penultimate strophe. To my mind, it seems as though St. Ambrose perhaps deliberately played down the presence of Christ in strophe 4, so that, with a view to putting it virtually into full practice in the religious life of fellow-Christians, he could apply Peter as a biblical figure more effectively in the seventh strophe, where, constituting part of the climax of the epilogue, Christ's reprimanding look and redemptive power are explicitly celebrated.

In his version of Peter's denial of Christ, St. Ambrose diverges from his biblical intertext (Matt. 26,75; Mark 14,72; Luke 22,60) in that Peter at the crowing of the cock in the fourth strophe of *Aeterne rerum conditor*, not only, in accordance with the biblical version, weeps in repentance, but, contrary to the Gospels' version, also washes away his guilt with his tears. Ambrose's application of Peter's denial of Christ, to my mind, makes a great impact on the audience's emotion, especially by virtue of his exploitation of Christ's implicit reprimanding look (the latter suggestion in accordance, of course, with his intertext, Luke 22,60-2), and also because of its brevity and simplicity. The example's above mentioned impact and influence on the congregation's emotion bestows upon it a certain emotive character. It is quite comprehensible that St. Ambrose in this regard chose Luke 22,61 as his intertext: of the three (Matthew, Mark and Luke) Luke is the only source mentioning the important fact that "the Lord turned around and looked straight at Peter". By referring to Peter washing away his guilt with his tears, and linking up closely strophe 7 with Peter's repentance and tears, implied earlier on in strophe 4, Ambrose by means of this technique ensures the relevancy, and increases the impact, of his message.

2.2. Intende, qui regis Israel

2.2.1. *The praesepe (manger)*

The metaphorical, doxological implementation of the shining manger in this hymn not only as proof of the contrast between the humiliation of Jesus as man, and His majesty and glory as God, but also symbolic of the expulsion of sin, is typical of St. Ambrose. We find this exemplified in strophe 8, v. 29: *praesepe iam fulget tuum* (See e.g. *In Luc.* 2,42). An analysis of the rest of the hymn reveals that the prayer in stanza 2 (repeated in stanza 5) has been heard; the processes of Mary's conception and the Incarnation of Christ, portrayed in stanzas 3 and 4, are accomplished: the climax is reached when in strophe 8 Christ lies in the manger, and our hymnographer, on behalf of his co-participant, the congregation, expresses the wish that the evident brilliance of Christ's manger, radiating the hitherto unknown Heavenly Light, may repel the darkness of sin, and shine with a continuous stream of faith.¹²

This particular instance proves to be an evidentiary and confessional example of the Lord's majesty and glory, which St. Ambrose employs to lead the Christian to praise, worship and adoration of Christ, i.e. also a doxological implementation of the biblical material.

2.3. Amore christi nobilis

2.3.1. *John, the Fisherman*

In accordance with Mark 1,16-20 St. Ambrose in his hymn, *Amore Christi nobilis* (strophes 2 and 3) metaphorically exemplifies the apostle John, who, in the time of Jesus, was a fisherman by profession, as one who has become a fisherman of the word of God and of men. Our hymnographer here uses a specific compositional technique to emphasize this spiritual function: referring in strophe 2 to John, as a true fisherman in the literal sense of the word, he, by means of juxtaposition, symbolically defines John in the very next strophe as a fisherman of the word of God (for the sake of man's redemption). Thus he indicates the transition from one life style, by the life-giving force of Christ's word, to a completely new and worthy-of-following style of life which, in fact, points to the attainment of Eternal Life.

¹² A.S. Walpole, *Early Latin Hymns with Introduction and Notes* (Cambridge 1922) 30-114.

2.3.2. Fides ... subnixa Christi pectore

The words *subnixa Christi pectore*, in line 15 of the same hymn, arouse our attention. St. Ambrose in his poetical and lyric description of the orthodox Christian faith in strophe 4 with an intriguing and remarkable allusion to John, the disciple, in the well-known scene of the Lord's Supper, in which Christ in the company of His disciples predicts His betrayal (John 13,23.25), succeeds in not only metaphorically focusing his audience's attention on Christian faith as an example to be imitated and followed, but also on John as the relevant, worthy-of-following biblical figure. The disciple whom Jesus loved (probably John [of Zebedee] himself),¹³ sitting next to our Lord, on request of Simon Peter, leaned over towards Christ to ask Him to whom He was referring. With *subnixa Christi pectore* St. Ambrose is, of course, directly referring to Christian faith, but indirectly implicating the true believer in close relation to Christ, leaning against His breast, like John(?), in true Christian faith, of which this disciple was an excellent example and magnificent teacher. By depicting Christian faith as acting humanly and leaning against Jesus Christ's breast, just as the disciple did who, at that specific moment in time, was involved in a personal relationship with Christ, the poet not only personifies Christian faith, but also very subtly propagates the worthy pursuit of a closer relationship between the true believer and Jesus Christ.

2.4. Victor Nabor Felix pii

2.4.1. *The milites Christi*

With 2 Tim. 2,3 as his source, the three Milanese martyrs, Victor, Nabor, and Felix, are exemplified by St. Ambrose in strophes 4-7 of *Victor Nabor Felix pii*, as loyal soldiers of Christ. The extent of the depiction of this idea, comprising almost four strophes, is a strong indication of the importance St. Ambrose attached to it. In this hagiographical hymn St. Ambrose, of course, does not have in mind the cruel, and hard, military soldier of the world, but, as expressed elsewhere in his own words: *non saeculi milites sed milites*

¹³ For the identity of this disciple, who in the early church generally was held to be John, the son of Zebedee, cf. J. Kügler, *Der Jünger, den Jesus liebte. Literarische, theologische und historische Untersuchungen zu einer Schlüsselgestalt johanneischer Theologie und Geschichte* (Stuttgart 1988) 12-13 and 439-48.

Christi,¹⁴ and also in this particular hymn, he encomiastically holds up before us as an example a spiritualized soldier who, having learnt by military service to lay down his life for a king, now accepts that it is comely to suffer for Christ: *decere pro Christo pati*, v. 20. Devotion to the earthly sovereign prepared him for devotion to a higher one. The weapons he needs are not the earthly, military weapons for attack and defence, but those of the spirit, such as true faith, the *scutum fidei*, man's religious shield and only defence against Satan and sin (Eph. 6,11-13.16). In the main St. Ambrose here follows his biblical intertext rather closely, but avails himself of some poetic licence and rather discursively, if not more pertinently than the intertextual rendering, contrasts the secular and the spiritual soldier, focusing sharply on the latter, for whom death is triumph, as the suggested example to be followed. The assertion that this representation not only to a large extent carries, but encomiastically also brings out in bold relief the entire message and theme of this hymn, would certainly not be unjustified.

3. CONCLUSION

For the employment and interpretation of biblical material, St. Ambrose mainly depends upon canonical Scripture. From the available evidence it can be inferred that although our hymnographer also exploits the Old Testament, he leans more heavily on the New Testament, and more specifically so on the four Gospels.¹⁵ Evidence collected in these hymns of St. Ambrose leads one to the conclusion that in the majority of cases St. Ambrose, when implementing biblical sources, closely follows the intertextual material, but in a few cases, recasts and adapts his sources, omits some important details, and even adds some interesting particulars not included in the intertext, in order to improve its relevancy and communicative force and consequently the didactic and instructive conveyance of his hymnal message.

The general conception of the use of biblical material in patristic literature, namely that it serves to be followed and imitated, is too vague to be applied purely and simply to a given author. In fact, our analysis of the hymns of St. Ambrose has revealed a more refined use of scriptural material which can accordingly be characterized as follows: presenting an ideal worthy to be imitated and followed; doxological and encomiastic; admonitory

¹⁴ In Ps. 38,35; *Epist.* 22,10; cf. also Ps. 19,8 (*Vulgate*).

¹⁵ Walpole 1922 (n. 13) 30-114.

(Paraenesis [warning/reminder; admonition]), i.e. eschatological in nature; consolatory and reassuring (Solatium and Confirmatio); confessional; didactic and instructive (conveying a lesson by virtue of biblical facts), and evidentiary in nature.

Since the biblical figures and events featuring in the hymns of St. Ambrose were undoubtedly known to his audience, and the limited length of his hymns did not allow unbridled elaboration, our hymnographer availed himself of the poetic power of allusion, association, suggestion, implication and other rhetorical devices. The biblical allusions also proved to be fully integrated with the text of his hymns. Therefore the various above-mentioned functions of the biblical material very subtly, but also forcefully enhance the communicative force of the evangelical message he wanted to put across, and to a large extent, help carry the theme of a particular hymn.¹⁶

¹⁶ The financial aid of the Centre for Science Development of the Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa is acknowledged regarding this article. I am grateful to the referees and also to Dr. A. Hilhorst of the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen for their valuable criticism.

PRUDENTIUS IN RECENT LITERARY CRITICISM

by

A.A.R. BASTIAENSEN

TEXTUAL PROBLEMS

In the years shortly before and after 400 the Spanish Christian writer Aurelius Prudentius Clemens created a voluminous corpus of Latin religious poetry. In the past decades this corpus has given rise to keen discussions. Some of these were concerned with textual criticism, centering on the controversial edition of Prudentius' works which M.P. Cunningham brought out in the CCSL series in 1966.¹ Up to that time the critical edition, published by J. Bergman in the Viennese Corpus in 1926,² offered the best text of Prudentius' works. Bergman's edition, the fruit of many years of hard work, had been well received in spite of some not unfounded criticisms by two classical scholars, F. Klingner³ and G. Meyer⁴. Meyer's studies in particular are exemplary. By proposing corrections in Bergman's text or by using it for his explanatory notes, he has contributed significantly to a proper understanding of several passages in Prudentius' *œuvre*, as has been pointed out by the later critics K. Thraede and Chr. Gnllka.⁵ Both these scholars observe, not without reason, that Cunningham has taken no, or insufficient, account of Klingner's and Meyer's remarks.

This reproach is one of the many Thraede formulates in his

¹ M.P. Cunningham, *Aurelii Prudentii Clementis Carmina* (CCSL 126; Turnholti 1966).

² J. Bergman, *Aurelii Prudentii Clementis Carmina* (CSEL 61; Vindobonae-Lipsiae 1926).

³ See his review of Bergman's edition in *Gnomon* 6 (1930) 39-52.

⁴ Cf. G. Meyer, "Prudentiana", *Philologus* 87 (1932) 249-60; 332-57; "Zu Prudentius", ib. 93 (1938) 377-403.

⁵ Cf. K. Thraede's review of Cunningham's edition, *Gnomon* 40 (1968) 681-91, esp. 685-6 and 688-9; Chr. Gnllka, "Theologie und Textgeschichte. Zwei Doppelfassungen bei Prudentius, *psychom. praef.* 38ff.", *WS* 19 (1985) 179-203, esp. 181 and 185.

cutting review of Cunningham's edition. Unfortunately, Cunningham exposed himself rather ineptly to the attack. The Latin of the introductory pages of his edition sins against the most elementary grammatical, syntactical and stylistic rules: "murderous" is Thraede's qualification, substantiated by some truly disconcerting instances.⁶ The same mishandling of Latin idiom appears in the redaction of the critical apparatus, where haste and misguided attempts at originality have often directed the editor's hand. A similar lack of discipline is shown by erroneous notices in the apparatus, more than once precluding a balanced judgment on the reading adopted in the text.⁷ Preparatory to his edition, Cunningham had published a few studies on the manuscript tradition of Prudentius' works which had raised expectations in the scholarly world.⁸ Thwarted, Thraede sought the cause of his disappointment in the very lack of restraint in Cunningham's edition, pointing particularly to the short duration of the editor's work as the main cause of the failure of the enterprise. Cunningham spent six years as against Bergman's almost thirty on an undertaking that, Thraede concludes, should have been omitted from the start. Cunningham's edition met with some support, be it hesitant, from J.-L. Charlet among others,⁹ but on the whole, Thraede's review did its work only too well. Over the last decades Prudentius scholars are usually on their guard when textual problems arise, consulting besides Cunningham's Bergman's edition as well. For according to Gnllka, this is "the continuing authoritative edition";¹⁰ or, to quote the more diplomatic formulation of Carmen Codoñer in her 1986 survey of Prudentian studies: "Cunningham's edition does not make Bergman's useless".¹¹ Codoñer's statement is surely to the point in that it implies that neither is Cunningham's edition useless. I think Thraede goes too far when he hints that it should not have seen

⁶ "Männermordend": cf. review (n. 5) 687.

⁷ See review (n. 5) 683-4.

⁸ Especially important is: "A Preliminary Recension of the Older Manuscripts of the *Cathemerinon*, *Apotheosis* and *Hamartigenia* of Prudentius", *Sacris Erudiri* 13 (1962) 5-59.

⁹ See in his review of R. Palla's edition of Prudentius' *Hamartigenia*, *JbAC* 25 (1982) 191-5, esp. 192.

¹⁰ "Die heute noch maßgebende Edition": cf. Gnllka 1985 (n. 5) 181.

¹¹ "L'édition de Cunningham ne rend pas inutile l'édition de Bergman": cf. *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* XII, 2, 2484-91, esp. 2490; the same position is held by W. Evenepoel, *Zakelijke en literaire onderzoeken betreffende het Liber Cathemerinon van Aurelius Prudentius Clemens* (Verhandelingen van de Koninklijke Academie voor Wetenschappen, Letteren en Schone Kunsten van België. Klasse der Letteren 41,91; Brussel 1979) 22.

the light. In his review, he himself concedes that Cunningham's eclectic method more than once produces the correct reading.¹² Moreover, Cunningham had more manuscript material at his disposal than Bergman. Bergman's limited choice is, in fact, restricted yet more by his uncritical acceptance of the readings of the two oldest Prudentius codices, the sixth century *Puteanus* in Paris and a sixth, or possibly seventh century *Ambrosianus* in Milan. Undoubtedly, the best course for the moment is to read Prudentius both in the Bergman and Cunningham editions, for only comparative study of manuscript information and editorial choice will serve the purpose of arriving at a satisfactory critical text.

The ideal edition of Prudentius Thraede is so anxiously awaiting, is as yet a dream. The prerequisites are numerous: a thorough knowledge of the poet's world, surroundings, historical and cultural backgrounds; awareness of his theological ideas and his ways of interpreting Holy Scripture; familiarity with his poetical technique and his practice of remodeling and reshaping materials from Rome's literary heritage. Primarily, the editor must be well-read in Prudentius' works, showing as they do a remarkable coherence: few Latin authors can be so easily explained from their own texts. Nearly all critics complain, however, that good running textual commentaries are still in short supply, partial results notwithstanding. This deficiency illustrates the extent of our ignorance of Prudentius' poetry. Conversely, good editions are a prerequisite for commentaries that may enlighten our ignorance. So we are prisoners of a *circulus vitiosus* that can only be broken gradually, by patient work. As we interpret we must establish the text, as we establish we must interpret it. Thraede himself has been preparing a commentary on the *Cathemerinon*, probably Prudentius' best researched work, for a long time;¹³ to the best of my knowledge, this commentary, so far, has not appeared—an indication of the intractability of the material a Prudentius scholar has to cope with. Hence, consideration and, yes, gratitude as well, are in order for anyone venturing upon the difficult task of preparing an edition. Every right choice he makes is a help towards correct interpretation, which, in turn, will benefit the next editor.

¹² See review (n. 5) 681. 685. 689.

¹³ For this information, see Marion M. van Assendelft, *Sol ecce surgit igneus. A Commentary on the Morning and Evening Hymns of Prudentius (Cathemerinon 1, 2, 5 and 6)* (Groningen 1976) 12.

THE PROBLEM OF THE VARIANT READINGS

In establishing the Prudentius texts, the variant readings probably pose the greatest problems. Of certain passages two readings are found in the manuscripts. This raises the question whether both originate from the poet's writing and correcting his own text, or of one of them being a later interpolation. An examination of this issue may demonstrate the interdependence of establishing the text on the one hand, and interpreting it on the basis of a thorough knowledge of the work on the other. Collation of manuscript evidence brought to light in nearly every one of Prudentius' works remarkable differences. These involve textual elements of, at times, as much as several lines in two different readings. Some manuscripts even present both readings, either successively or as an amalgam. Notably, the oldest extant manuscripts, the above-mentioned *Puteanus* and *Ambrosianus*, often also share in this ambiguity. Hence, the eagerness of many critics to move the origins of these doublets as far back as possible, i.e. to the author. Prudentius himself, they assert, produced two texts, the second one being a correction of the first. Thus, not an interpolation by another, but an improved version by the poet's own hand lies at the root of the double tradition.

This was the conclusion Klingner arrived at in a discussion of one of the key passages involved, eight lines from one of Prudentius' most spectacular hymns, *Cathemerinon* 10 (*circa exsequias defuncti*), 9-16, presented in a double redaction by the manuscripts. In fact restating the opinions of Heinsius in the seventeenth and of Winstedt at the beginning of the twentieth centuries, Klingner held that the text as it appears in the *Puteanus* is the oldest redaction (it is missing from the *Ambrosianus*). It was apparently changed by the poet himself out of respect for the orthodox faith; he produced a new, less offensive text which has come down to us by way of the younger witnesses; these, therefore, present us with a variant reading by the author's own hand.¹⁴

After Klingner, the question was debated by Italian scholars in particular. In 1934 G. Pasquali adopted Klingner's conclusions.¹⁵ Elaborating on Pasquali, P. Pelosi, in 1940, counted twenty-five

¹⁴ See Klingner's review of Bergman's edition in *Gnomon* (n. 3) 41-3. For the opinion of Heinsius and Winstedt (E.O. Winstedt, "The double recension in the poems of Prudentius", *Classical Review* 17 [1903] 203-207) on the origin of the double redaction, see Cunningham (n. 1) 53.

¹⁵ G. Pasquali, *Storia della tradizione e critica del testo* (Firenze 1934¹) 435-7; again in 1952², 435-7.

authorial variants, seven of which are to be found in the *Cathemerinon*.¹⁶ A year later, Pelosi's study met with sharp criticism from G. Lazzati who considered corrections by Prudentius' own hand to be very questionable.¹⁷ In 1947 J.H. Waszink, in Leyden, joined in the discussion: in his commentary on Tertullian's *De anima*, he rejects an authorial correction in *Cathemerinon* 3,100, which he had defended before.¹⁸ In 1953 W. Schmid argued forcefully in favour of the thesis of later interpolation with respect to two passages in the second book *Contra Symmachum*.¹⁹ In 1958 A. Salvatore rose in resolute defence of the authorial variant. He claimed its occurrence in two other passages of the *Cathemerinon*, apart from 10,9-16.²⁰ Finally, E. Pianezzola published a study in 1965 on the disputed text of *Cathemerinon* 10,9-16, in which he stated as his opinion that only the reading of the *Puteanus* was Prudentius' own version; the other redaction was a corruption due to a later hand.²¹ This second redaction was intended as a doctrinal correction, but Pianezzola shows convincingly that the reading of the *Puteanus*, as compared with theological statements elsewhere in Prudentius, is both unquestionably orthodox and unmistakably Prudentian, and actually of a greater coherence than its counterpart. Presumably, a later corrector, reading heterodoxy in the lines of *Cathemerinon* 10, thought fitting to adjust the text.

A year after the publication of Pianezzola's study Cunning-

¹⁶ P. Pelosi, "La doppia redazione delle opere di Prudenzio", *Studi Italiani di Filologia Classica* 17 (1940) 137-80.

¹⁷ G. Lazzati, "Osservazioni intorno alla doppia redazione delle opere di Prudenzio", *Atti del Reale Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti* 101 (1941-1942), Classe di Scienze Morali e Letterarie, 217-33. L. Alfonsi, while not wholly agreeing with Lazzati's argumentation, accepts his conclusions in *Aevum* 16 (1942) 181-2.

¹⁸ J.H. Waszink, *Quinti Septimi Florentis Tertulliani De anima edited with introduction and commentary* (Amsterdam 1947) 308; for his former opinion, see *Mnemosyne* 3,11 (1942) 75-7.

¹⁹ W. Schmid, "Die Darstellung der Menschheitsstufen bei Prudentius und das Problem seiner doppelten Redaktion", *VC* 7 (1953) 171-86 (inserted in W. Schmid, *Ausgewählte philologische Schriften* ed. H. Erbse - J. Küppers [Berlin - New York 1984] 365-77).

²⁰ A. Salvatore, *Studi Prudenziiani* (Napoli [no indication of date, but in fact 1958]) 119-66. Salvatore's study has shed much light on Prudentius' poetical technique of amalgamating existing literary material. The issue will be discussed below.

²¹ E. Pianezzola, "Sulla doppia redazione in Prudenzio Cath. X, 9-16", *Miscellanea critica. Aus Anlaß des 150. jährigen Bestehens der Verlagsgesellschaft und des graphischen Betriebes B.G. Teubner, Leipzig*, herausgegeben von den Mitgliedern der Redaktion der Bibliotheca Teubneriana J. Irmscher, Br. Dör, R. Müller, Ursula Peters (2 vols., Leipzig 1965) II, 269-86.

ham's edition appeared, advancing in his turn a double redaction of *Cathemerinon* 10, 9 ff. by Prudentius' own hand. The editor defends his choice by appealing to his affinity with Prudentius' poetry, and to Heinsius', Winstedt's and Klingner's precedents.²² Thraede reacts with bitter sarcasm.²³

Then yet another formidable and combative critic takes the field, the above-mentioned Gnilka who, in 1963, had published a pioneering study on Prudentius' *Psychomachia*.²⁴ In an article entitled "The Problem of Interpolation in the Textual Tradition of Prudentius"²⁵ Cunningham illustrated and enlarged on an observation he had put forward in his edition in favour of the authorial variant.²⁶ Cunningham directed the study at Gnilka with whom, as he tells us, he had exchanged some letters on the subject. The discussion, however, got nowhere. In spite of Gnilka, Cunningham maintained the double readings he had adopted in his edition and rejected categorically the possibility of later interpolations. In a short reply, Gnilka turned down Cunningham's option.²⁷ Discussing a passage from the second book *Contra Symmachum* in 1989, some ten years after Cunningham's death, Gnilka once again revives the debate in a more sharply formulated criticism.²⁸ In the intervening time Gnilka had tackled the problem more than once,²⁹ always rejecting the possibility of a second redaction by the poet himself.³⁰ At the same time, he en-

²² See edition (n. 1) XXII and 53; see also 58, on *Cathemerinon* 10,130, equally under discussion.

²³ See review (n. 5) 690-1.

²⁴ Chr. Gnilka, *Studien zur Psychomachie des Prudentius* (Klassisch-philologische Studien 27; Wiesbaden 1963).

²⁵ M.P. Cunningham, "The Problem of Interpolation in the Textual Tradition of Prudentius", *TAPhA* 99 (1968) 119-41.

²⁶ See edition (n. 1) XXII.

²⁷ Chr. Gnilka, "Das Interpolationenproblem bei Prudentius". Appendix to "Beobachtungen zum Claudiantext", in *Studien zur Literatur der Spätantike. Festschrift W. Schmid* (Bonn 1975) 86-90, esp. 89 n. 65.

²⁸ *Contra Symmachum* 2, 143; see Chr. Gnilka, "Palaestra bei Prudentius", *ICS* 14 (1989) 365-81, esp. 370 n. 24.

²⁹ See for instance: "Zwei Textprobleme bei Prudentius (*Contra Symmachum* 2, 423-427; *Hamartigenia* 887-891)", *Philologus* 109 (1965) 246-58; "Kritische Bemerkungen zu Prudentius' 'Hamartigenie'", *Hermes* 112 (1984) 333-52; "Eine interpolatorische Ehrenrettung Davids", *Vivarium. Festschrift Klauser zum 90. Geburtstag* (JbAC Ergänzungsband 11; Münster 1984) 136-43; "Theologie und Textgeschichte" (see n. 5); "Zwei Binneninterpolamenta und ihre Bedeutung für die Geschichte des Prudentiustexts", *Hermes* 114 (1986) 88-98.

³⁰ In this connection Gnilka often refers to a study of G. Jachmann (republished by Gnilka in G. Jachmann, *Ausgewählte Schriften* [Beiträge zur Klassischen Philologie 128; Königstein Hain 1981]): "Das Problem der Urvariante in der Antike und die Grundlagen der Ausoniuskritik", in *Concordia decennalis. Festschrift der Universität Köln und des Petrarcahauses* (Köln 1941) 47-104. Other, similar studies of Jachmann are referred to by Gnilka in his several studies.

larged the scope of the problem by condemning as interpolations and removing from the text lines attested to by all witnesses. Gnillka does not hesitate to interfere with the text when internal criticism, based on a sharp analysis of the passage involved and operating with intimate knowledge of Prudentius' thinking and style of reasoning, makes him conclude that Prudentius cannot be credited with the reading of the manuscripts. A remarkable example is the operation performed on the *Praefatio*: Gnillka revokes the stanzas nine and eleven of this well-known and often quoted poem, obtaining an indisputably better text.³¹ Taken overall, Gnillka's sharply honed argumentations make for admirable philological criticism.

The issue of the variant readings affects our viewpoint of the oldest tradition of the text. If the codices of the sixth and seventh centuries have already been interpolated, it follows that the text of Prudentius must have been subject to corrupting influences of a theological or philological character from the earliest days on. Cunningham's advocate, J.-L. Charlet, dismisses the idea that even the *Puteanus* may contain interpolations.³² But Gnillka does not hesitate to expunge elements from the *Puteanus* as well, being convinced that textual corruption started very soon after initial publication. Alterations evoked swift reactions by early *editores*, with the result that double transmissions of certain passages began to circulate. A copyist would insert both versions, marking with an obelisk the one he considered suspect. This obelisk may have disappeared in a later stage, causing both readings to be joined and, subsequently, to blend in a given strand of the tradition. Be this as it may, both textual corruption and efforts to protect the text belong to the earliest phase of the tradition and, without taking the author into consideration, the resulting complications can account for the errors.

Such is Gnillka's line of reasoning, argued persuasively and with great felicity of expression. Compared with this logic, Cunningham's line of defence in "The Problem of Interpolation" does not stand a chance. His edition suffered from haste and from lack of method; hence the more or less improvised character of his rejoinder. All in all, Gnillka seems to me to be right. His penetrating

³¹ Chr. Gnillka, "Zur *Praefatio* des Prudentius", *Filologia e forme letterarie: Studi offerti a Francesco della Corte* (5 vols., Urbino 1987) IV, 231-51.

³² See his review of Palla (n. 9); similarly Marion van Assendelft (n. 13) 199, who considers, with Pelosi, that the double version of *Cathemerinon* 8,8 must be Prudentius' own work, because of the "relatively short lapse of time between original publication and the oldest extant ms." (= the *Puteanus*).

analyses of the text are exemplary; his conclusions and proposals constitute precious material for later editors to benefit from. Perhaps they will not adopt every one of his readings, but they will have to adduce very solid arguments to assign uncertainties in the text to the author's own redaction.

In reviewing the critical work on Prudentius' text we conclude that in the last twenty-five years successes have been scored partially thanks to, partially in spite of Cunningham's edition. We also realize more than ever that a good knowledge of the whole of Prudentius' *œuvre* and a sharp analysis of the individual passages are the prerequisites of satisfactory editorial work. Several useful monographs have appeared lately, especially on the hymns of the *Cathemerinon* and the *Peristephanon*,³³ but research must go on including, in particular, studies on Prudentius' equally important hexametrical poetry,³⁴ thus ensuring that the next edition of the *opera omnia* may be a substantial improvement on Bergman's and Cunningham's texts.

PRUDENTIUS' POETRY ONE POEM?

As has been mentioned above in passing, the strong internal coherence of Prudentius' writing forms a particularly important feature, facilitating an interpretation from the poet's own writings. There are numerous echoes both within the individual poems and mutually between the poems. This phenomenon may be due to the fairly plausible assumption that Prudentius wrote all his poetry in the relatively short period after the ending of his career in the imperial administration. Some take this notion a step further, seeing the whole of Prudentius' *œuvre* as one piece of writing, a poetical unity, the individual works being its constituent parts. The main defender of this thesis is W. Ludwig. In a paper read at the 1976 conference of the "Fondation Hardt" in Geneva, he likens Prudentius' poetry to an early Christian basilica. It resembles an architectural unity of different spaces, the multiples of the numerals seven and twelve in the number of the basilica's columns

³³ We have Marion M. van Assendelft 1976 (n. 13); W. Evenepoel 1979 (n. 11); Anne-Marie Palmer, *Prudentius on the Martyrs* (Oxford 1989).

³⁴ Two important commentaries on the dogmatic hexametrical poems have seen the light within the last decades: K. Smolak, *Exegetischer Kommentar zu Prudentius (Hymnus, Praefatio, Apotheosis 1-216)* (Diss. Wien 1968, only in typewritten form), a partial study of the *Apotheosis*; and R. Palla, *Prudenizio. Hamartigenia. Introduzione, traduzione e commento* (Pisa 1981). They invite further studies.

corresponding with these same multiples in the number of the poems and of the lines in the poems. According to Ludwig, the poet realized a comprehensive Christian composition, presenting all important poetical categories, epic, didactic, lyric, epigrammatic and elegiac, even comic and tragic (in the *Peristephanon*), "a large-scale poetical construction".³⁵

It is a bold vision, unique in the history of literature, and presumably too good to be true. Ludwig himself adduces a restriction when he does not exclude the possibility that some of the poems were first published separately.³⁶ In point of fact, in the discussion following his paper his thesis met with some approval. To be sure, Ludwig was not the first to postulate a strong unity of conception and execution for Prudentius' poetry. In a long article in *Vigiliae Christianae*,³⁷ W. Steidle had put forward in 1971 Prudentius' poetical intention as "something like an all-embracing presentation of Christian truth", and he had pointed to the "symmetry in the construction of the whole work". First, he said, there is a collection of lyrical poetry (the hymns of the *Cathemerinon*), then five books of epic-didactic poetry, with the epic *Psychomachia* at the centre, preceded and followed by two didactic works (the *Apotheosis* and *Hamartigenia* preceding, the two books *Contra Symmachum* following), finally a second collection of lyrical poetry (the hymns of the *Peristephanon*). This forms a well-balanced composition of altogether seven poems ("seven, the important number in the Christian world") all dedicated to the *concelebrare deum*, as Prudentius himself indicates in the *Praefatio* to his work. The whole then constitutes "a unified and grand composition", with works of a different kind arranged to form a whole, a synopsis of Christian poetry, to match the sum of all pagan literature.³⁸

As Ludwig and Steidle operated independently from one an-

³⁵ "Eine poetische Großkomposition": see W. Ludwig, "Die christliche Dichtung des Prudentius und die Transformation der klassischen Gattungen", in *Christianisme et formes littéraires de l'antiquité tardive en Occident* (Entretiens Fondation Hardt 23; Genève 1977) 303-63 (followed by discussion: 364-73), esp. 303; for the comparison with the basilica, see ib. 348-55.

³⁶ Ib. 304.

³⁷ W. Steidle, "Die dichterische Konzeption des Prudentius und das Gedicht *Contra Symmachum*", VC 25 (1971) 241-81.

³⁸ Ib. 248: "so etwas wie eine Gesamtdarstellung der christlichen Wahrheit"; 262: "die ... Symmetrie im Bau des Gesamtwerkes"; "die für das Christentum bedeutsame Siebenzahl"; 248: "eine einheitliche und ... großartige Komposition". As to Prudentius' proclamation of *concelebrare deum*, see *Praefatio* 36.

other,³⁹ the similarity of their conclusions is all the more striking. This may be caused by the strong Christian inspiration that permeates all of Prudentius' poetry, generating affinities and cross-references of every kind, primarily doctrinal ones. Gniska observes: "An internal connection between the individual works, particularly with regard to the long hexametrical poems, is manifest". Immediately after he adds: "How much of this is owed to systematic planning and arrangement is questionable".⁴⁰ Two years later Fontaine writes in the same vein: he speaks of an "organic whole", but dismisses as excessive the idea of one poetic structure, a "superpoem".⁴¹

Is the systematization the result of a preceding plan or the upshot of the actual writing or of a later arrangement? Ludwig and Steidle opt for previous design, the existence of which, they feel, is suggested by the arrangement of the poems in the manuscripts. The lyrical collections are at the beginning and at the end, enclosing the epic poetry; this consists of five poems, with the *Psychomachia* at the centre, preceded and followed by two didactic works. This significant arrangement both authors hold to be intentional, the more so because it corresponds with the programme the poet unfolds in the *Praefatio*, one of the three poems *extra ordinem* (*Praefatio*, *Epilogus* and *Hymnus de trinitate*) Prudentius wrote as accompaniments to the collection of his poetry.

But this poses problems. The programme of the *Praefatio* says approximately:⁴² let my soul sing of the Lord in hymns (*Praef.* 37-38; = *Cathemerinon*); let it fight against heresies and expound the true faith (*Praef.* 39; = *Apotheosis* and *Hamartigenia*); let it reject pagan rites and sacrifices and strike down the idols of Rome (*Praef.* 40-41; = *Contra Symmachum* I and II); let it praise in songs martyrs and apostles (*Praef.* 42; = *Peristephanon*). Where is the *Psy-*

³⁹ Ludwig 1977 (n.35) 306 mentions Steidle's article and sees Steidle's vision as akin to his own, but it is clear that his study does not depend on Steidle's.

⁴⁰ "Ein innerer Connex der einzelnen Werke, besonders der großen hexametrischen Gedichte, ist unverkennbar ... Es fragt sich nur, wieviel davon auf das Konto systematischer Planung und Anordnung zu setzen ist": see Chr. Gniska, "Interpretation frühchristlicher Literatur, dargestellt am Beispiel des Prudentius", in *Impulse für die lateinische Lektüre. Von Terenz bis Thomas Morus* ed. H. Krefeld (Frankfurt am Main 1979) 138-80, esp. 179 n. 93.

⁴¹ "Un tout organique": see J. Fontaine, *Naissance de la poésie dans l'Occident chrétien* (Paris 1981) 159; cp. also J.-L. Charlet, "La poésie de Prudence dans l'esthétique de son temps", *BAGB* 1986, 368-86, esp. 369-70.

⁴² *Praefatio* 37-42: (my soul in her songs) *hymnis continuet dies, / nec nox ulla uacet quin dominum canat; / pugnet contra hereses, catholicam discutiat fidem; / conculcet sacra gentium, / labem, Roma, tuis inferat idolis; / carmen martyribus deuoueat, laudet apostolos.*

chomachia, the work that is central in the scheme?⁴³ Ludwig thinks it is included in the line relating to the *Apotheosis* and *Hamartigenia* (*Praef.* 39).⁴⁴ Steidle holds that the *Psychomachia* was part of Prudentius' programme, however unclear the formulation in the *Praefatio*.⁴⁵ I fear these explanations evade rather than solve the problem. Ludwig himself says that, for Prudentius, the *Psychomachia* was the high tide of his poetry, "a Christian parallel to the *Aeneis*".⁴⁶ Why, then, was it not included *expressis verbis* in the programme of the *Praefatio*?

The date of origin of the *Praefatio* should also be taken into account. This was around the year 405, as the text itself tells us. The poet was born in the year of consul Salia (= 348) and was now in his fifty-seventh year.⁴⁷ There can be no doubt that Prudentius had written most of his poetry by then. So, while being presented as a preface, the *Praefatio* is really an epilogue. The absence of the *Psychomachia* from the *Praefatio* is most easily explained by supposing that, at the moment of publication of the *Praefatio*, the *Psychomachia* had not yet been written. Thus, correctly I think, Gnllka, who holds that the *Psychomachia* dates from shortly after the year 405.⁴⁸ Anyway, in view of the uncertainty around this work the value of the *Praefatio* as a rendering of an all-embracing poetical project by Prudentius, appears somewhat problematical. In this context, an accessory detail might be of some importance. In the *Puteanus*, the oldest extant manuscript, the *Praefatio* probably was not incorporated. The first pages of the *Puteanus* have

⁴³ As regards the *Dittochaeum*, the situation, probably, is a particular one; this collection of inscriptions seems to be occasional poetry, perhaps for the decoration of a church, and, as such, does not fit into a regular corpus of poems.

⁴⁴ Ludwig 1977 (n. 35) 313-316. On this issue, Palmer tends to agree with Ludwig: see Palmer (n. 33) 18 n. 38, and ib. 17 n. 37 the mention of others of the same opinion. Ludwig is also supported by C.W. Mönnich, *Königsvanen. Latijns-christelijke poëzie tussen Oudheid en Middeleeuwen 300 - 600* (Bronnen van de Europese cultuur 5; Baarn 1990) 175-6 and 218-26.

⁴⁵ Steidle 1971 (n. 37) 260.

⁴⁶ "Ein christliches Analogon zur *Aeneis*": see Ludwig 1977 (n. 35) 308-309.

⁴⁷ *Praefatio* 24: *oblitum ueteris me Saliae consulis arguens*; 1-3: *Per quinquennia iam decem, / ni fallor, fuimus; septimus insuper / annum cardo rotat, dum fruimur sole uolubili*.

⁴⁸ Chr. Gnllka, "Ein Zeugnis doppelchörigen Gesangs bei Prudentius", *JbAC* 30 (1987) 58-73, esp. 73 n. 57. See also Fontaine 1981 (n. 41) 158-9. Further information on the various opinions in I. Lana, *Due capitoli prudenziani* (Verba Seniorum N.S. 2; Roma 1962) 39 ff. In recent years, Danuta Shanzer has come out, too strongly perhaps, for a date of origin after 405, in: "Allegory and Reality: Spes, Victoria and the Date of Prudentius' *Psychomachia*", *ICS* 14 (1989) 347-63. She is very sceptical with regard to Ludwig's thesis, in: "The Date and Composition of Prudentius' *Contra orationem Symmachi libri*", *RFIC* 117 (1989) 442-62, esp. 446 n. 3.

perished, but Cunningham's affirmation, against Bergman, that the lost part did not contain the *Praefatio* has been borne out by Anne-Marie Palmer's inspection of the codex.⁴⁹

Apart from the value of the *Praefatio* for Ludwig's and Steidle's theory, there is also the problem of hymn ten of the *Peristephanon*, on the martyrdom of Romanus. Its 1140 iambic *senarii* give it the aspect of an autonomous work. Moreover, its place in the *Peristephanon* collection varies from manuscript to manuscript, and not until editions of the sixteenth century, influenced by the *scholia* of the humanist scholar Johannes Sichardus, does it register as number ten of the *Peristephanon* hymns. Thraede points this out emphatically in his review of Cunningham's edition.⁵⁰ It is all the more remarkable, in my view, that he defends with verve Ludwig's thesis of the single all-encompassing poem elsewhere, in a reaction to Gnilka.⁵¹ Referring to the arrangement suggested by Sichardus, Meyer, the philologist mentioned above, argued that the Romanus hymn was originally an independent *libellus*.⁵² Evidently Thraede, in turn, depends on Meyer. Closer investigation enabled Gnilka to fix the composition of this poem as being prior to the other works.⁵³ It seems to me that this independence, coupled with the uncertainty about the place of insertion in the framework of the collection, does not agree with a previous detailed blueprint.

All in all, Prudentian poetry as a unit is subject to doubt. Brožek even puts forward the theory that Prudentius' poems were arranged after the poet's death on the basis of the indications in the *Praefatio*; from this arrangement the manuscript tradition then descended.⁵⁴ This is the exact opposite of Ludwig's and Steidle's opinion, supposing as it does that no arrangement can be assigned to Prudentius himself, at least not the one familiar to

⁴⁹ M.P. Cunningham, "Some facts about the Puteanus MS", *TAPhA* 89 (1958) 32-7; Palmer 1989 (n. 33) 6 n. 3. Whether the *Ambrosianus*, equally *mutulus*, contained the *Praefatio* is unclear: see Cunningham (n. 1) XII.

⁵⁰ See review in *Gnomon* (n. 5) 687 n. 2 (to text of 686).

⁵¹ K. Thraede, "»Auferstehung der Toten« im Hymnus ante cibum des Prudentius (Cath. 3, 186/205)", in *Jenseitsvorstellungen in Antike und Christentum. Gedenkschrift Stuiber* (JbAC Ergänzungsband 9; Münster 1982) 68-78, esp. 68 n. 1.

⁵² Meyer 1932 (n. 4) 354 n. 82.

⁵³ Chr. Gniska 1985 (n. 5) 183-4.187. Gniska refers to L. Müller, *De re metrica poetarum latinorum praeter Plautum et Terentium* (Petropoli-Lipsiae 1894²) 230, who assigns it a special place in Prudentius' *œuvre*, characterizing the hymn as an *epullion*.

⁵⁴ M. Brožek, "De Prudentii praefatione carminibus praefixa", in *Forschungen zur römischen Literatur. Festschrift zum 60. Geburtstag von Karl Büchner* ed. W. Wimmel (2 vols., Wiesbaden 1970) I, 31-6.

us from the tradition of the text. There have been few reactions to Brožek's thesis so far, but recently Anne-Marie Palmer came out in favour of it.⁵⁵ Brožek's study certainly demonstrates that we are largely ignorant, as was mentioned above, of the pristine tradition of Prudentius' works, of what happened between the moment of composition and the moment of their being committed to the oldest surviving manuscripts. This ignorance about the first period of textual tradition warns us against jumping to conclusions: the indisputable coherence of Prudentius' poetry does not necessarily imply a preconceived overall poetical project.

THE ARRANGEMENT OF THE LYRICAL POETRY

Concerning the individual works too, the possibility of a preconceived project is a point of discussion, especially with regard to the *Cathemerinon* and *Peristephanon*. What is the correlation between the hymns within both collections? Does the arrangement as found in the manuscripts reflect a predetermined design? Without going into the details of this question, I wish to compare two monographs, one by J.-L. Charlet on the *Cathemerinon*, the other by Anne-Marie Palmer, on the *Peristephanon*. The study on the *Cathemerinon* takes the view that Prudentius arranged the poems of this collection according to a pre-arranged scheme and that this preconceived structure is mirrored in the prosody, the number of stanzas, the number of lines, etc.⁵⁶ The other work considers the *Peristephanon* to be a loose collection of autonomous hymns, written at different occasions for different personalities or communities and circulated individually, to be assembled afterwards to form a collection, with the exception of the separate Romanus hymn.⁵⁷ Systematization is, of course, more natural in a standard

⁵⁵ Palmer 1989 (n. 33) 87 n. 117; 18 n. 38 with reference to Winstedt (n. 14) 206-207.

⁵⁶ J.-L. Charlet, *La création poétique dans le Cathémérinon de Prudence* (Paris 1982) 45-61. Cf. also J.-P. Mazières, "L'architecture symbolique du Cathémérinon de Prudence", *Vita Latina* (Avignon 1989) no. 113, 18-24. I mention as well a recent study on the structure of the *Cathemerinon* in which a special connection is proposed between hymns seven, nine and eleven: P. Toohey, "An Early Group of Poems in Prudentius' Liber Cathemerinon", *Mnemosyne* 44 (1991) 395-403. See also Francesca Recanatini, "Strutture numeriche del «Liber Cathemerinon» di Prudenizio", *Orpheus* N.S. 12 (1991) 563-9 and P. Toohey, "Concentric Patterning in Some Poems of Prudentius' liber Cathemerinon", *Latomus. Revue d'Etudes Latines* 52 (1993) 138-50.

⁵⁷ Palmer 1989 (n. 33), *passim*, esp. 87-8; on the Romanus hymn not being included, see 5 and 248. The varying arrangement in the manuscripts, quite apart from the Romanus hymn, causes editor Cunningham (n. 1) to state (see

series of prayers than in a collection of hymns on the martyrs, but the difference between Charlet and Palmer is nonetheless remarkable. The reactions of the critics on Charlet's system are, in fact, mixed. On the whole, Evenepoel is in favour; Gnllka, on the other hand, thinks that Charlet implies a closer interrelationship in the *Cathemerinon* than Prudentius had in mind.⁵⁸ Be this as it may, certainly regarding the *Peristephanon* and, to a lesser degree, regarding the *Cathemerinon*, we are well advised to allow for specific circumstances to have influenced the shaping and arranging of Prudentius' hymns. This fact, we may conclude, presumably weakens the plausibility of a pre-arranged detailed scheme for the whole of his poetry even further.

UNITY OF THEOLOGICAL THOUGHT

The fact remains that Prudentius' poetry presents a strong internal unity. Coherence of theological thought, in particular, is manifest. Many topics come in for repeated discussion in different poems, the passages clarifying each other and throwing light on the theological ideas of the poet, which are possibly more consistent than is commonly assumed. When Thraede states that Prudentius is "a nonentity, theologically speaking", following this up with the disconcerting remark that "nothing else was to be expected from him as a poet",⁵⁹ I believe he does less than justice to Prudentius.

In spite of scholarly doubts, the trinitarian doctrine of his *Hymnus de trinitate*, one of the poems *extra ordinem*, may well accord with passages from other works, making it possible to detect a consistent line of theological thought in the various texts.⁶⁰ To quote another instance, Evenepoel shows that Prudentius is aware of the importance of the relation between faith and rea-

XII-XXVII, esp. XXVI): "De ordinibus carminum in libro Peristephanon multa nescimus. Ordo communis, etiam si Romanum abstraxeris, nihil omnino auctoritatis habet." This fact, too, seems to point to a more or less fortuitous compilation afterwards, not to a premeditated plan.

⁵⁸ W. Evenepoel, "Some literary and liturgical problems in Prudentius' *Liber Cathemerinon*. On Jean-Louis Charlet, 'La création poétique dans le *Cathémérinon* de Prudence'", *RBPh* 64 (1986) 79-85; Chr. Gnllka in a review of the same work in *Gnomon* 59 (1987) 299-310, esp. 302-303.

⁵⁹ "Theologisch erwiesenermaßen ganz unbedeutend ... das ist auch gar nicht anders zu erwarten, wenn er als Dichter gelten soll": see K. Thraede, *Studien zu Sprache und Stil des Prudentius* (Hypomnemata 13; Göttingen 1965) 15. Smolak is at variance with Thraede, recognizing Prudentius' "richness of thought" ("Gedankenfülle"): cf. Smolak 1968 (n. 34) XIII.

⁶⁰ Doubts expressed by K. Smolak (n. 34) 11-13. I am referring to a study of mine on the *Hymnus de trinitate*, to be published in the *Acta* of the Eleventh Oxford Conference on Patristic Studies 1991.

son, dealing with it in a judicious way in his works.⁶¹ Buchheit and Evenepoel have both written on the *Cathemerinon* in a series of studies, systematically pointing out many intertextual agreements within Prudentius' poems and agreements with texts by other early Christian writers.⁶² I confine myself here to referring to Buchheit's study on the doctrine of the *resurrectio carnis*, which he maintains against Thraede as being treated coherently at the end of the third hymn of the *Cathemerinon*.⁶³ On the other hand, one may agree with Gniska when he observes the ambivalence of Prudentius' dualistic outlook as showing the poet's uncertainty with regard to the relation of man's soul and body.⁶⁴ Although Prudentius was certainly not the "profond théologien" a French critic in the last century made him out to be,⁶⁵ his theological views deserve, I think, serious examination. Fortunately, the interest in the theologian Prudentius seems to be on the increase. Besides the studies already mentioned, research has lately been done among others by Fontanier, who qualifies Prudentius as "le poète-théologien",⁶⁶ Padovese,⁶⁷ Torró,⁶⁸ Micaelli⁶⁹.

⁶¹ W. Evenepoel, "Prudentius: Ratio and Fides", *L'Antiquité Classique* 50 (1981) 318-27.

⁶² V. Buchheit in *VC* 40 (1986) 261-85; 44 (1990) 222-41; *WS* 99 (1986) 245-59; 101 (1988) 297-312; *Philologus* 134 (1990) 50-65; 136 (1992) 256-73 (in the articles references to other studies). W. Evenepoel in *Kleio* (Louvain) 7 (1977) 162-72; 8 (1978) 11-23; *RBPh* 56 (1978) 55-70; *WS* 91 (1978) 232-48; *Maia* (Bologna) 35 (1983) 125-35.

⁶³ V. Buchheit, "Resurrectio carnis bei Prudentius", *VC* 40 (1986) 261-85. Although Thraede had sharply criticized Buchheit's study on the St Lawrence hymn in the *Peristephanon*, Buchheit's reaction to Thraede 1982 (n. 51) in this article is formally correct. Cf. V. Buchheit, "Christliche Romideologie im Laurentius-Hymnus des Prudentius", in *Das frühe Christentum im römischen Staat* ed. R. Klein (Wege der Forschung 267; Darmstadt 1971) 455-85 (originally in *Polychronion. Festschrift Dölger* ed. P. Wirth [Heidelberg 1966] 121-44); Thraede's criticism in: "Rom und der Märtyrer in Prudentius", in *Romanitas et Christianitas. Festschrift Waszink* ed. W. den Boer e.a. (Amsterdam-London 1973) 317-27.

⁶⁴ Cf. Chr. Gniska 1963 (n. 24) 1-26: the dualism in *Cathemerinon* 10,21-32 less pronounced than in the *Psychomachia*.

⁶⁵ A. Bayle, *Etude sur Prudence, suivie du Cathemerinon traduit et annoté* (Paris 1860) 91.

⁶⁶ J.-M. Fontanier, "Christus imago Dei: art et christologie dans l'œuvre de Prudence", *RecAug* 21 (1986) 117-37; "La création et le Christ créateur dans l'œuvre de Prudence", *RecAug* 22 (1987) 109-28; for the expression "le poète-théologien", see 109.

⁶⁷ L. Padovese, "Linee di soteriologia nell'opera di Aurelio Clemente Prudenizio", *Laurentianum* 19 (1978) 360-90. From the same author also: *La cristologia di Aurelio Clemente Prudenizio* (Analecta Gregoriana 219; Roma 1980).

⁶⁸ J.P. Torró, *La antropología de Aurelio Prudenicio* (Publicaciones del Instituto Español de Historia Eclesiástica. Monografías 23; Roma 1976). From the same author: "Función del Espíritu Santo en la encarnación según Aurelio Prudenicio", *Anales Valentinianos* 9 (1983) 347-60 and: "Dei genetrix. Testimonio de

PRUDENTIUS' ORIGINALITY: A CHRISTIAN RENDERING OF ROME'S POETRY

Stronger still than the unity of theological thought is the unity of inspiration. Prudentius is an inspired Christian, deeply convinced of the truth and worth of his faith. Two of the three poems *extra ordinem*, the aforementioned *Praefatio* and the *Epilogus*, both speak of the driving force of his poetry, the desire to *concelebrare deum*, the intention of honouring God with his poems. Each mortal is in duty bound to sacrifice to God, and he, Prudentius, sacrifices his poetry: such is the content of the *Epilogus*. In 1936 I. Rodríguez-Herrera published the German edition of his study on the *poeta christianus*, translating and republishing it in 1981 in Spanish. In this book, dealing explicitly as it does with the religious character of Prudentius' poetry, the *Praefatio* and the *Epilogus* receive due attention.⁷⁰ There is no denying the fact that the whole of his work fulfills the programme and substance as set out in these poems. Prudentius writes from his Christian convictions which, in his best moments, result in truly inspired poetry. Or so the prevailing opinion says.

A critical voice made itself heard in 1965 when Thraede published a monograph on the language and style of Prudentius. Justifiably, J. Fontaine characterized it as "a provocative book".⁷¹ His pen sharpened as always, Thraede pours scorn on the "amateur judgments", the uncritical value-judgments in favour of Prudentius uttered by many a literary historian.⁷² He counteracted them with his own critical examination of Prudentius' work, dissecting among others the *Epilogus* which he analyses word for word.⁷³ According to Thraede, Prudentius' poetical expression, exhibited with special vigour in the programmatic *Praefatio* and *Epilogus*, in final analysis boils down to not much more than a collection of rhetorical devices. The poet displays, he says, a random composition of commonplaces and stylistic elements taken from the liter-

Prudencio sobre la maternidad divina de María", *Anales Valentinus* 10 (1984) 315-22.

⁶⁹ Cl. Micaelli, "Note di teologia prudenziana", *Vetera Christianorum* 21 (1984) 83-112.

⁷⁰ I. Rodríguez-Herrera, *Poeta christianus. Prudentius' Auffassung vom Wesen und von der Aufgabe des christlichen Dichters* (Diss. München, Speyer 1936); *Poeta christianus. Esencia y misión del poeta cristiano en la obra de Prudencio* (Bibliotheca Salmanticensis. Estudios 40; Salamanca 1981) 11-32.

⁷¹ Thraede 1965 (n. 59); Fontaine's judgment ("livre provocant") in a review of Thraede's study in *REL* 44 (1966) 571-4, esp. 573; see also, by the same, *Naissance* (n. 41) 297.

⁷² "Liebhaberurteile": Thraede 1965 (n. 59) 8: he also aims at scholars like E.K. Rand and E.R. Curtius.

⁷³ Thraede 1965 (n. 59) 28-78.

ary tradition, and characterized by unnatural language and flawed imagery. In his amalgamating technique Prudentius, moreover, merges fragments of classical poetical language with specimens of biblical and Christian speech, thus engendering a new set of rhetorical clichés. Quoting Petronius (90,3) Thraede concludes that Prudentius more often spoke *poetice quam humane*, his presumption being that in Prudentius' days, poetry generally speaking was a poetry of mere imitation, utterly lacking in originality.⁷⁴

Understandably, many "amateurs", among them eminent literary critics, felt hurt. The abovementioned Fontaine recognized the value of stylistic analysis as such but denied that the presence of a literary play of words automatically implies inauthentic feelings. Péguy and Claudel, the two French religious writers, would not, he says, survive such an approach.⁷⁵ A similar reaction, but sharper still, nearly indignant, came from the late well-known Swedish critic, H. Hagendahl. He calls Thraede's book "independent and stimulating but excessively subtle and exaggerated".⁷⁶ He comments: "No poem can survive such a razor-sharp dissection of every word ... ; spirit and aim of the poetical text evaporate, leaving only a heap of *membra disiecta* ... How is it possible to misunderstand so completely ... the driving force of Prudentius, without which his poetry would never have come into being?"⁷⁷ Van der Nat, from Leyden, hits the mark in the same way: "Thraede does not take the religious meaning of Prudentius' idea of sacrifice seriously enough (in the *Epilogus*)".⁷⁸ Landfester states: "The disclosure of stereotyped elements in a poem cannot be identical with the denial of individual substance".⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Thraede 1965 (n. 59) 16 n. 34. Thraede's big idea permeates of course the whole of his study.

⁷⁵ See his review (n. 71) 573.

⁷⁶ "Selbständig und stimulierend, aber spitzfindig und übertrieben": see H. Hagendahl, *Von Tertullian zu Cassiodor. Die profane literarische Tradition in dem lateinischen christlichen Schrifttum* (Studia Graeca et Latina Gothoburgensia 44; Göteborg 1983) 138 n. 141.

⁷⁷ "Kein Gedicht verträgt eine so messerscharfe Sektion jedes Wortes ... ; Geist und Zweck der Dichtung verdunsten, sichtbar bleibt nur ein Haufen von *membra disiecta* ... Wie ist es möglich, bei Prudentius ... die treibende Kraft, ohne die die Dichtung nicht entstanden wäre, in dieser Weise zu verkennen?": see Hagendahl ib. 73-4.

⁷⁸ "Thraede nimmt die religiöse Bedeutung des Opfermotivs bei Prudentius zu wenig ernst": cf. P.G. van der Nat, "Die Praefatio der Evangelienparaphrase des Iuvencus", in *Romanitas* (n. 63) 248-57, esp. 256 n. 18.

⁷⁹ "Der Nachweis typischer Elemente in einem Gedicht kann nicht identisch mit der Leugnung eigener Substanz sein": cf. M. Landfester, in his review of Thraede's work in *Poetica. Zeitschrift für Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaft* 1 (1967) 415-22, esp. 416.

The tenor of all these objections is the same and is to be found also in the remark Paschoud formulates, at the beginning of his historical study *Roma aeterna*, with regard to late-Latin literature in general: "People insist too often that a strong rhetorical structure in a literary discourse excludes all sincerity on the part of the author; ... a totally wrong application of a sterile recipe".⁸⁰ The critics agree that Prudentius' use of traditional rhetoric does not necessarily preclude an inspired expression of authentic religious feelings. Asked point-blank, Thraede probably would not endorse the opposite view, for his appraisal of the poet Prudentius seems to waver. In a later study, he recognizes that a particular turn of phrase of the poet "sounds vigorous", adding that Prudentius "embraces the whole width of literary tradition to reshape and re-edit it".⁸¹ Elsewhere, discussing the conclusion of hymn three of the *Cathemerinon*, he declares that Prudentius' lyrical poetry aims at "*concelebrare deum* in language, both learned and terminologically refined"; and he continues almost enthusiastically: "In the last two stanzas he succeeds in creating a real specimen of confession of faith in the form of a gripping as well as graceful adaptation of Virgilian material".⁸²

It sounds almost as the opposite of Thraede's thesis in his monograph, this reception of Virgil, outstanding feature of traditional rhetoric, having been transformed into a piece of real and inspired poetry according to this critic.

Thraede's general appraisal of Prudentius may lack generosity but he is right in stressing the necessity of thorough philological research. One of the essentials of this research has been highlighted by Thraede himself, as by many other critics. It concerns Prudentius' amalgamating technique, recombining elements

⁸⁰ "On admet trop souvent que, dans un développement littéraire, une forte structure rhétorique exclut toute sincérité de la part de l'auteur; ... application absolument abusive d'une stérile recette": cf. F. Paschoud, *Roma aeterna. Etudes sur le patriotisme romain dans l'Occident latin à l'époque des grandes invasions* (Bibliotheca Helvetica Romana 7; Rome 1967) 14-15. On the rhetorical character of one of Prudentius' poems (*Peristephanon* 10: the Romanus hymn), we now have a specialist's approach, in fact mainly descriptive, in R. Levine, "Prudentius' Romanus: The Rhetorician as Hero, Martyr, Satirist, and Saint", *Rhetorica. A Journal of the History of Rhetoric* 9,1 (1991) 5-38.

⁸¹ "kräftig klingt"; "daß er literarische Tradition in aller Breite aufgreift und kontaminierend verarbeitet": cf. Thraede 1973 (n. 63) 321.326 n. 18. He qualifies Prudentius' style of writing as "varied" ("vielseitig"), 324.

⁸² "ebenso gelehrt wie im Wortlaut gefeilt »concelebrare deum«"; "gelingt ihm in den letzten zwei Strophen ein echtes Stück Glaubensbekenntnis in Gestalt ebenso zupackender wie kunstvoller Vergilrezeption": cf. Thraede 1982 (n. 51) 76.78.

from the classical and the Christian literary tradition, the underlying question being whether originality can be achieved by merging traditional elements. As an answer, let us observe in the first place that poetry always is an exercise with material passed on by a former generation, the vocabulary of a given language. Originality, therefore, resides not in the material itself but in how it is used. If poetry is handed down from generation to generation, if, in other words, it becomes literature, not only the lexical material is inherited, but certain methods of combination as well. No poet starts from scratch. He is a genuine poet if he puts the traditional material and the methods of rearranging it in effective new combinations. In literary traditions—the word tradition itself is significant—such originality is subject to variation. In periods of great productivity all kinds of previously unknown arrangements are discovered and so poetry seems to begin anew. But this new start is a burden for the successors, for the inventions tend to become obligatory material restricting the freedom of composition. The poet who associates himself with this tradition, the literary epigone, must show part of his originality in his handling of the newly acquired combinations, which have become inescapable.

All critics acknowledge Prudentius' unrivalled ability in this field. Salvatore in particular emphasized the creative force of Prudentius' methods of amalgamating in his study of 1958,⁸³ and Thraede, discussing Salvatore's work, praises the Italian scholar for this judgment.⁸⁴ In the introduction to his partial edition of the *Apotheosis* K. Smolak writes: "Prudentius ... continues to be admired because of the richness of his thought and considered original because of the profusion of his recombinations".⁸⁵ Evenepoel formulates: "The emulating variation on and rearranging of well-known models of expression and wordcombination has pride of place in Prudentius' *elocutio* ... Frequently and with great facility he absorbs striking *loci*, motifs and wordcombinations from classical poetry in a spontaneous and creative way".⁸⁶ Sister Ralph Hanna offers a nice description of Pruden-

⁸³ Salvatore 1958 (n. 20), *passim*.

⁸⁴ See his review of Salvatore in *JbAC* 5 (1962) 186-7.

⁸⁵ "Prudentius ... bleibt wegen seiner Gedankenfülle bewundernswert und wegen der überreichen Kontamination originell": cf. Smolak 1968 (n. 34) XIII (in X-XIII the topic is Prudentius' "technique of recombining" ("kontaminatorische Technik").

⁸⁶ "Een belangrijke plaats in de *elocutio* wordt ingenomen door het wedijverend variëren op en verwerken van bekende voorstellingswijzen en woordver-

tius' poetical technique: "The poet works by deliberately pillaging specific sources; his brilliance resides in the tastefulness and in the sureness with which he recombines his materials".⁸⁷ Finally, S. Döpp, describing the new heyday of Latin literature around the year 400, sees Prudentius' craft as typical of this brilliant era by characterizing his reworking of Virgil, *Aeneis* 1,278-9, in *Contra Symmachum* 1,541-2, as a "telling example ... of that type of reception that predominates in the golden age of late antiquity, the creative one".⁸⁸

The Prudentian technique exploits all the achievements of the Latin poetical tradition, Virgil's and Ovid's epic, Lucretius' didactic, Horace's lyrical, Seneca's dramatical and Juvenal's satirical poetry. But use is made of biblical material too, the epic narrative of the Pentateuch, the lyrical effusion of the Psalms, and their absorption in Christian literature, the prose texts of Tertullian, Cyprian, Ambrose; the epic poetry of Juvencus and even Proba, and especially the lyrical poetry of Hilary and Ambrose.⁸⁹ The critics and commentators have the difficult task to discover all the reminiscences, imitations, echoes and allusions, and to analyze Prudentius' incorporation of these borrowings often with a special intention, as will be discussed below. No research on Prudentius can do without this literary detective work.

Because of this manifold reprocessing of the transmitted materials Prudentius' *œuvre* is baroquely exuberant, at times adopting neo-Alexandrian mannerism with its refinement of imagery and terminology, at times using a more pathetic diction in an effort to heighten the poignancy of the scenes. French critics in particular, e.g. J. Fontaine, J.-L. Charlet and J.-M. Poinssotte, are sensitive

bindingen ... Prudentius maakt op spontane wijze, met gemak, veelvormig en creatief treffende *loci*, motieven en woordverbindingen uit de klassieke poëzie tot de zijne": cf. W. Evenepoel, "Een stukje oudchristelijke poëzie: Prudentius' Hymnus ante cibum, II", *Kleio* (Louvain) 8 (1978) 11-23, esp. 20. From the same critic on Prudentius' personal way of restructuring traditional data: *Zakelijke en literaire onderzoeken* (n. 11) 51-87, with a listing of contacts with literary predecessors and the conclusion: "Prudentius' relationship with the literary tradition is conspicuously dynamic" ("Prudentius' verhouding tot de literaire traditie is opvallend dynamisch").

⁸⁷ Ralph Hanna III, "The Sources and the Art of Prudentius' *Psychomachia*", *Classical Philology* 72 (1977) 108-115, esp. 115.

⁸⁸ "eindrucksvolles Beispiel ... für denjenigen Typus von Rezeption, der in der spätantiken Blüteperiode überwiegt, den schöpferischen": cf. S. Döpp, "Die Blütezeit lateinischer Literatur in der Spätantike", *Philologus* 132 (1988) 19-52, esp. 43; Döpp has a great respect for "the high art of Prudentius" ("Prudentius' hohe Kunst"): see 34 n. 56.

⁸⁹ See Evenepoel 1979 (n. 11) 51-87.

to this "mixing of genres and tones",⁹⁰ this "original poetic alchemy",⁹¹ this "colour at once epical and precious",⁹² these "impressions of polychromatism",⁹³ etc. When discussing Prudentius' hymns J.-L. Charlet speaks of "poetry aiming at totality".⁹⁴ This qualification, expressing both the all-embracing amalgamation, and the complete orientation on God of these poetic creations, is undoubtedly applicable to all of Prudentius' poetry.

This Prudentian textual restructuring, at times no more than a change of decor, more than once must have caused a strange shock of recognition in readers steeped in classical and biblical literature. E.g. the hexameter-ending *spiritus ore* in Lucretius' description of Mars craving for Venus' love: *eque tuo pendet resupini spiritus ore* (*De rerum natura* 1,37), becomes the hexameter-ending of a fine line on the procession of the Holy Spirit within the Trinity in Prudentius: *Sanctus ab aeterno subsistit spiritus ore* (*Hymnus de trinitate* 3). It is equally amazing to find Anchises' prediction on the expansion of the Roman empire by Augustus (Virgil *Aeneis* 6,795: *proferet imperium*), reproduced in a Christian theological context by Prudentius in *Apotheosis* 93: *protulit imperium*. The change of tense is significant, but there is also a striking change of decor: with Prudentius it is the realm of creation that has been brought into being by the Word.

And, probably, Prudentius' text amounts to more than just a change of decor. His expression certainly ties in with the preceding line 88, where the light of the Godhead dominating the realm of the universe is called *dominatrix rerum*. But another relation may be detected as well, i.e. with the ensuing words of Anchises' prophecy: *iacet extra sidera tellus, extra anni solisque uias*, words that bestow an unworldly splendour to Augustus' achievement. Pru-

⁹⁰ "Mélange des genres et des tons": cf. Charlet 1986 (n. 41) 385; he also refers to Fontaine's study, mentioned in the next note.

⁹¹ "Alchimie poétique originale": cf. J. Fontaine, "Le mélange des genres dans la poésie de Prudence", in *Forma Futuri. Studi in onore di M. Pellegrino* (Torino 1975) 755-77, esp. 758; in this article three trends are described as influencing Prudentius' poetry: classicism tinged by Alexandrian elements, late-Latin neo-Alexandrianism, Christian orientation.

⁹² "Couleur épique et précieuse tout à la fois": cf. J. Fontaine, "Trois variations de Prudence sur le thème du paradis", in *Forschungen zur römischen Literatur* (n. 54) 1, 96-115, esp. 101-102.

⁹³ "Effets de polychromie": cf. J.-M. Poinssotte, "La présence des poèmes antipaïens anonymes dans l'œuvre de Prudence", *REAug* 28 (1982) 33-58, esp. 57.

⁹⁴ "Poésie totalisante": cf. Charlet 1986 (n. 41) 373, concluding the analyses that begin at 371.

dentius' formulation would then hint at a deeper level. The political reality of the Roman empire established by Augustus in a magnified perspective becomes the cosmological reality of the universal empire, created by the Son. Obviously, it is impossible to adduce indisputable evidence in this field, but there can be no doubt that Prudentius reacts with the utmost sensitivity to the possibilities of exploring the depths and widening the scope of Virgil's open-ended poetry. The child of the fourth eclogue becomes Mary's Child in the Nativity-hymn (hymn eleven) of the *Cathemerinon*.⁹⁵ Jupiter's prophecy of the everlasting future of an all-dominating Rome in *Aeneis* 1,278-9: *His ego nec metas rerum nec tempora pono. Imperium sine fine dedi*, receives its Christian terrestrial fulfilment in Theodosius' domination over an enduring Rome in *Contra Symmachum* 1,541-2: *Denique nec metas statuit nec tempora ponit. Imperium sine fine docet*. The scope is broadened even further to encompass the Christian Rome of the martyrs Peter and Paul, and, finally, the heavenly consummation of *Roma caelestis*.⁹⁶

Undoubtedly, the high point of this poetical transformation is the *Psychomachia*, the description of the struggle within the individual soul and in all Mankind that ends with the victory of virtue and the construction of a temple, the City of God. The first line, *Christe, graues hominum semper miserate labores*, is decisive in that it refocuses Aeneas' prayer to Apollo: *Phoebe, graues Troiae semper miserate labores* (*Aeneis* 6,56). As Apollo has become Christ and Troy Mankind, so has political struggle in preparation for the founding of Rome become religious struggle in preparation for the founding of the temple, the City of God.

This interpretation, proposed by Ludwig in his controversial thesis of the one all-inclusive poem,⁹⁷ decidedly reflects Prudentius' intention. Gnilka agrees in a formulation of his position concerning this Prudentian rewriting of Virgil's text, which was

⁹⁵ See Salvatore [1958] (n. 20) 79-115; P. Courcelle, "Les exégèses chrétiennes de la quatrième eclogue", *Revue des Etudes Anciennes* 59 (1957) 294-319, esp. 298-9.305.

⁹⁶ Cp. *Peristephanon* 2 (the hymn in honour of the Roman martyr Lawrence), 413-65.548-60. On Prudentius' appraisal of Rome, see J. Fontaine, "Romanité et hispanité dans la littérature hispano-romaine des IV^e et V^e siècles", in *Assimilation et résistance à la culture gréco-romaine dans le monde ancien. Travaux du VI^e Congrès International d'Etudes Classiques. Madrid 1974* (Bucuresti-Paris 1976) 301-22, esp. 308 and n. 20. Cf. also the important study of E. Paratore, "Prudenzio fra antico e nuovo", in *Passaggio dal mondo antico al medio evo da Teodosio a San Gregorio Magno* (Atti dei convegni lincei 45; Roma 1980) 51-86, esp. 71-86, and the interpretation of Buchheit 1971, with criticism by Thraede (n. 63). I will return to the topic 'Rome' below.

⁹⁷ Ludwig 1977 (n. 35) 309-310.

prompted by a radical study by the American scholar Macklin Smith.⁹⁸ According to Smith, Prudentius when writing the *Psychomachia* did not intend to widen the scope or deepen the perspective of the *Aeneis*, but to replace it. The Christian poet Prudentius repudiates the pagan poet Virgil, as he shows in the first line of the *Psychomachia*, which, by its invocation of Christ, is a deliberately insulting disapprobation of beaten Apollo.⁹⁹ Smith sees Prudentius' formulations as "contrast-imitations" in the strictest sense. The term "contrast-imitation", which keeps recurring regarding Christian poetry, and especially regarding Prudentius,¹⁰⁰ can be taken in a non-antagonistic sense. It indicates that Virgilian expressions—and expressions of other classical poets—are restructured, widened, provided with a deeper background, hence changed from, and, in a sense, contrasted with their original use. The poet has no intention to oppose the Virgilian example, let alone to replace it. I would agree when Gnllka says that the last thing Prudentius wanted was to do away with the *Aeneis*. The *Psychomachia* seeks to equal Virgil's epic. The *Aeneis* is seen as a living work of art requiring a Christian *aemulatio*, and qualifying for such an *aemulatio* because of its intrinsic worth. Of course, Prudentius sometimes challenges Virgil directly. So in the last lines of hymn three of the *Cathemerinon*, admired even by Thraede. *Aeneis* 6,126.128-9 states: "easy is the descent into the nether world ... but to come the way back and to attain the world of the living, that is difficult, there lies the problem". As a Christian, the poet answers with the text of *Cathemerinon* 3,198-200: "I remember that God in bodily form (= Christ) returned from the nether world with easy step to the world of the living (or "to heaven")".¹⁰¹ But this is not contrast-imitation in an antagonistic sense, no "assault on Virgil", to quote the title of one of Smith's chapters.¹⁰² The poet does not repudiate the *Aeneis*, he grants it recognition, an answer on equal level. Smith may be right in

⁹⁸ See Gnllka's review of Macklin Smith, *Prudentius' Psychomachia. A Re-examination* (Princeton 1976), in *Anzeiger für die Altertumswissenschaft* 32 (1979) 89-93. See also Gnllka 1979 (n. 40) 148.

⁹⁹ Smith 1976 (n. 98) 271-4.

¹⁰⁰ See e.g. K. Thraede, "Epos" (B, 2, b, 5), *RAC* 5 (1962) 1039-41.

¹⁰¹ *Aeneis* 6,126.128-9: *facilis descensus Averno, ... Sed reuocare gradum superasque euadere ad auras, hoc opus, hic labor est*; *Cathemerinon* 3,198-200: *corporeum memini de Flegethonte gradu facili ad superos remeasse deum*: see Thraede 1982 (n. 51) 77-8; see also in the above the text corresponding with n. 82. Cp. also Buchheit 1986 (n. 63) 274 and 284-5, n. 137 and 138; in n. 137 a remark on *superi* in Prudentius' text in the sense of "heaven", not "world of the living", as Thraede translates.

¹⁰² Smith 1976 (n. 98) 234.

speaking of a Virgilian revival in aristocratic circles like those around Symmachus and Macrobius with his *Saturnalia* at the end of the fourth and in the first decades of the fifth century.¹⁰³ Prudentius' answer to this literary development, however, is not an attempt to overthrow the poet of Rome's greatness, but acknowledgement of his poetry by restructuring it in a Christian sense.

Let us close this chapter with a double conclusion that has become accepted opinion in the research of the last decades. First, it is better not to call Prudentius a classicist poet or to characterize him simply as someone who models Christian contents to antique moulds. Secondly, the qualification "Christian humanist", proposed in the twenties, is similarly problematical.¹⁰⁴ To be sure, Prudentius is rooted in the classical tradition, and he expresses Christian contents in antique forms. But these forms are not his only material. The Bible and the Christian tradition equally determine his language, and the technique of his lyrical verse owes as much to Hilary's and Ambrose's innovations as to the traditional forms of the Augustan era. His merging of different elements produces a new kind of originality in which the classical inheritance fully asserts its rights, but as no more than one of the components. And Prudentius certainly was not a humanist in the sense that commitment to the *bonae litterae* as such was the driving force of his life and works. He was a Christian and harnessed his great poetical gifts to the expression of his faith. *Praefatio* and *Epilogus* and the tenor of all his poetry lead us to surmise that he would gladly have welcomed Rodríguez-Herrera's simple qualification: *poeta christianus*.

FOUR COROLLARIA

Many topics remain to be treated with regard to Prudentius. Within the scope of this study I confine myself to discussing briefly four more issues that deserve our attention.

¹⁰³ Ib. 236.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. E.K. Rand, "Prudentius and Christian Humanism", *TAPhA* 51 (1920) 71-83; 80 the rather bold formulation "finely pagan performance"; 83 "the finest expression of Christian humanism ... ; few if any between his own times and those of Dante can contest this palm with him". In contrast with this, see on the strong Christian accents, against a Virgilian background, in Prudentius, Paratore's study on Prudentius between old and new (n. 96).

Prudentius' biography

The first one concerns Prudentius' biography. The research of the past decades has not added much to our knowledge of the circumstances of his life. The sources just happen to be in scant supply, making a critical biography in the modern sense of the word impossible. Virtually the only information at our disposal is what the poet writes in retrospect about his life and career in the *Praefatio*. This review, however, is not a documentary, but a poetical one, consequently, leaving much room to the imagination. The most conspicuous effort to transform the suggestions of the *Praefatio* into biographical information is constituted by the first half of Lana's study.¹⁰⁵ He offers conjectures about the course of Prudentius' administrative career, including a governorship in Savia (Illyricum) and the direction of an office in the imperial chancellery. However, too much of it being guesswork, the initial scholarly interest in Lana's study has gradually declined. After all, understanding of Prudentius' personality and his attitude as a poet is gained by the fundamental testimony in the *Praefatio* about his conversion to the writing of religious poetry rather than by detailed information about his previous bureaucratic career. A remarkable work in this context is C.W. Mönnich's *Koningsvanen*,¹⁰⁶ a book dedicated to Christian Latin poetry in late Antiquity in general, but featuring Prudentius in the foreground. In a series of surveys the whole of his work is analyzed, resulting in the presentation of a spiritual and literary portrait of the poet. Without the help of biographical data his personality comes to life. One may cavil at details of Mönnich's interpretations, but, on the whole, this makes for very rewarding reading.¹⁰⁷

In spite of its insubstantiality, we return for a moment to Prudentius' "material" biography. One aspect of it has been object of discussion among the critics, viz. what was his way of life after his conversion. Did his decision to dedicate himself more fully to

¹⁰⁵ Lana 1962 (n. 48).

¹⁰⁶ Dutch translation of *Vexilla regis*, "The King's Banners": see n. 44.

¹⁰⁷ This is not the case, in my view, with Martha M. Malamud, *A Poetics of Transformation. Prudentius and Classical Mythology* (Cornell Studies in Classical Philology 49; Ithaca-London 1989). This study is based on two premisses: 1) Prudentius juggles with words, he is a "cryptogrammatist" (e.g. 44-5: the last words of the *Hamartigenia*: *poena levis clementer adurat* contain in anagram the poet's name: *Aurelio Clemente se clamante*), 2) In a psycho-analytical approach martyrology and mythology meet (e.g. 150: "Agnes' role ... as a virginal prostitute"; 176: The name Prudentius is Latin for Greek Prometheus - the mythological hero Prometheus wore a crown - Prudentius writes *Peristephanon* = "about crowns"). One cannot but observe: *Quod gratis affirmatur, gratis negatur*.

God take the form of a *propositum*, the adoption of an ascetical lifestyle? Was he perhaps a member of an ascetical community, one of those numerous congregations of fervent Christians that came into being from the second half of the fourth century onward? Fontaine¹⁰⁸ describes Prudentius as an ascetic committed to an *otium* of religious character, enjoying a *uita rustica*, a life in the country. In these surroundings he pursued the *cultura animi et corporis*, as did his "neighbour" from the other side of the Pyrenees ("circumpyrénéen"), Paulinus of Bordeaux, who began his ascetical life in Barcelona and ended as bishop of Nola. This concept has the added attraction of assuming that certain elements of Prudentius' poetry, the hymns in particular, functioned in the daily round of prayers of some cultured ascetical community to which he himself would have belonged. Prudentius' adherence to such a communal life of religious observance is thought probable by several critics: Fontaine, Charlet, Evenepoel.¹⁰⁹ In this connection, J. Petruccione's observation may be quoted that, in his hymn on the passion of St Eulalia in *Peristephanon* 3, Prudentius lays particular stress on the ascetical aspect, her martyrdom being shown to be the expression of feminine ascetic perfection.¹¹⁰

Prudentius and Rome

The second topic that I wish to refer to is one that has given rise to a good many discussions, even among historians. It deals with Prudentius the Roman and connected problems,¹¹¹ such as his rela-

¹⁰⁸ J. Fontaine, "Valeurs antiques et valeurs chrétiennes dans la spiritualité des grands propriétaires terriens à la fin du IV^e siècle occidental", in *Epektasis. Mélanges Daniélou* (Paris 1972) 572-95.

¹⁰⁹ Fontaine 1981 (n. 41) 180-2; Charlet 1982 (n. 56) 86-7; Evenepoel 1979 (n. 11) 29-43. Prudentius' membership of such a community is thought improbable by Marianne Kah, "Die Welt der Römer mit der Seele suchend ...". *Die Religiosität des Prudentius im Spannungsfeld zwischen 'pietas christiana' und 'pietas romana'* (Hereditas. Studien zur Alten Kirchengeschichte 3; Bonn 1990) 307-19.

¹¹⁰ J. Petruccione, "The Portrait of St Eulalia of Mérida", *Analecta Bollandiana* 108 (1990) 81-104; 103 the hymn is called "on one level a martyr narrative and on another a portrait of feminine ascetic perfection".

¹¹¹ See besides the studies quoted below: V. Buchheit 1971 (with Thraede's criticism: see n. 63); G. Torti, "Patriae sua gloria Christus. Aspetti della romanità cristiana di Prudenizio", *REL* 104 (1970) 337-68; R. Cacitti, "Subdita Christo servit Roma Deo. Osservazioni sulla teologia politica di Prudenizio", *Aevum* 46 (1972) 402-35; S. Mazzarino, "Tolleranza e intolleranza: la polemica sull'Ara della Vittoria", in *Antico, tardoantico ed era costantiniana I* (Storia e civiltà 13; Bari 1974) 339-77; S. Döpp, "Prudentius' Gedicht gegen Symmachus. Anlaß und Struktur", *JbAC* 23 (1980) 65-81; Paratore 1980 (n. 96); R. Klein, "Die Romidee

tionship with the emperor Theodosius and his sons Honorius and Arcadius, Honorius in particular; the purpose of his poem in two books against that other Roman, a Roman of Rome, Symmachus; his hopes or fears concerning the future of the empire; possible contacts with that other poet-patriot, Claudian, etc. The Rome-issue has been touched upon above in the chapter on the Christian rendering of Rome's poetry, but some specific points may yet be added.

First of all, mention must be made of the generally accepted opinion that Prudentius' *œuvre* cannot be dissociated from the political activity of that other Spaniard, Theodosius, the restorer of the empire and creator of a new, Christian, Rome. In Prudentius' eyes, this was a momentous time, holding out the prospect of a golden future, but also a frightening time, since the struggle for Rome between paganism and Christianity was as yet undecided. In that struggle Prudentius passionately takes sides. His books *Contra Symmachum* are not just an exercise in rhetoric. Out of concern for a Christian Rome he harks back to Ambrose's protest of a few years before against Symmachus, leader of the pagan senatorial faction. The senator had addressed a petition to the emperor in order to prevent the removal from the curia of the altar of the goddess Victoria. Some historians hold that Symmachus had addressed another petition, in 402, which would have occasioned more particularly Prudentius' reply. However this may be, Prudentius incorporates elements from Ambrose's remonstrance in his verse, enlarging its scope so as to include a plea in favour of the imperial house and the portrayal of a visibly reborn and ideal Rome.¹¹² Actually, the unity of the two books *Contra Symmachum* is controversial, one of the questions involved being whether Symmachus brought out a new petition in 402. After Steidle, Barnes and Ludwig, Döpp defends their unity, especially against Callu and Jill Harries, but Danuta Shanzer rejects Döpp's argumentation. A year before Shanzer's perhaps over-confident and peremptory study, Baldini had joined the ranks of those defending

bei Symmachus, Claudian und Prudentius", in *Colloque genevois sur Symmaque à l'occasion du mille-sixcentième anniversaire du conflit de l'autel de la Victoire* ed. F. Paschoud (Paris 1986) 119-44; J.-L. Charlet, "Sit devota Deo Roma. Rome dans le *Contra Symmachum* de Prudence", in *Commemoratio. Studi di filologia in ricordo di Riccardo Ribaudi* ed. S. Prete (Didascaliae II; Sassoferato 1986) 33-41.

¹¹² See Fontaine 1976 (n. 96) 307-309; J.-M. Poinssotte 1982 (n. 93) 33-58; W. Evenepoel, "Prudence et la conversion des aristocrates romains", *Augustinianum* 30 (1990) 31-43.

the unity of the work with a very thorough and well-documented article. In 1992 Heim followed suit¹¹³

As it happened, Prudentius' politico-religious views were soon overtaken by events. In 410 the city of Rome fell a prey to the Goths under Alaric, conquerors Prudentius would have considered to be barbarians. The fall of the city induced Augustine to delineate a history of Mankind in a non-political perspective, one that was not primarily terrestrial, the City of God. A lasting relationship between *romanitas* and *christianitas* along the lines of the imperial theology of Eusebius of Caesarea¹¹⁴ proved unrealizable.

Prudentius' belief that its realization was possible has been branded as rigidly conservative Roman patriotism.¹¹⁵ Let it be pointed out, however, that Prudentius in no way canonizes the terrestrial Rome: his perception has a strong transcendental component, as is shown by the glorification of the celestial Rome in the hymn in honour of St Lawrence.¹¹⁶ The poet never loses sight of the purely religious Christian point of view. The emperor Augustus may have played a providential role in history, as Prudentius readily concedes, but venerating him as a deity is abominable paganism.¹¹⁷ The construction of the temple, culminating point of the *Psychomachia*, is the construction of a *templum mentis et templum ecclesiae*, reminding one of the heavenly Jerusalem, Augustine's City of God, not of the Rome of the Caesars.¹¹⁸ In the poems *extra ordinem*, *Praefatio*, *Epilogus* and *Hymnus de trinitate*, which proclaim the poet's motivation, politics do not play a part at all. One might even say that the line in the *Praefatio* on the

¹¹³ Steidle 1971 (n. 37), *passim*; T.D. Barnes, "The historical setting of Prudentius' *Contra Symmachum*", *American Journal of Philology* 97 (1976) 373-86, esp. 377; Ludwig 1977 (n. 35) 312; S. Döpp, "Prudentius' *Contra Symmachum* eine Einheit?", *VC* 40 (1986) 66-82; J.P. Callu, "Date et genèse du premier livre de Prudence contre Symmaque", *REL* 59 (1981) 235-59; Jill Harries, "Prudentius and Theodosius", *Latomus* 43 (1984) 69-84; Shanzer 1989 (n. 48) 442-6; A. Baldini, "Il *Contra Symmachum* di Prudenzone e la conversione del senato", *Rivista Storica dell'Antichità*, 17-18 (1987-1988) 115-57; F. Heim, *La théologie de la victoire* (Théologie Historique 89; Paris 1992) 257-67.

¹¹⁴ See Paschoud 1967 (n. 80), *passim*; M. Fuhrmann, "Die Romidee der Spätantike", *Historische Zeitschrift* 207 (1968) 529-61, esp. 556-9.

¹¹⁵ See Fuhrmann (n. 114), 556-9; see also notes 74 and 76.

¹¹⁶ See n. 96 and corresponding text.

¹¹⁷ Cf. D. Fishwick, "Prudentius and the Cult of Divus Augustus", *Historia. Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 30 (1990) 475-86. The late Ilona Opelt speaks of a "stripping the magic" ("Entzauberung") off Augustus' image by Prudentius: cf. "Prudentius und Horaz", in *Forschungen zur römischen Literatur* (n. 54) I, 206-13, esp. 207. See also Chr. Gnllka, "Satura tragica. Zu Juvenal und Prudentius", *WS* 103 (1990) 146-77, esp. 171-5 and n. 91.

¹¹⁸ See Gnllka 1963 (n. 24) *passim*.

books *Contra Symmachum* is inimical to Rome, which is seen as essentially a city of idolatry.¹¹⁹ To my way of thinking, therefore, Marianne Kah suggests too much with the title of her recent study: "Seeking the world of the Romans with great fervour ...". Prudentius' religiosity caught between 'pietas christiana' and 'pietas romana'.¹²⁰ She presents us with a good description, be it perhaps too much a twentieth-century one, of Prudentius' *pietas romana*, but the tension she suggests exists between Prudentius the Christian and Prudentius the Roman does not really emerge. To me at least, the idea of two souls in Prudentius' breast seems untenable.

Allegorical or sacramental poetry?

The third problem, which happens to touch on all sectors of early Christian literature, could be formulated in a simplified, and at first sight perhaps cryptic, way, in the form of a question: is a given poetical text allegory or sacrament? Thus, with regard to the first stanza of the first hymn of the *Cathemerinon* the question must be asked: what connection is there between the figure of the crowing cock and the figure of the awakener Christ, both heralds of light? Is it referential only, the one evoking allegorically the image of the other, or is it a relationship at a deeper level, a kinship that makes us recognize the one in the other, the underlying assumption being that Nature's utterances are by way of being God's utterances, that in Nature's voice as in a sacrament it is the Creator of Nature who speaks? In every literature there are instances to document the poetical perception of such a sacramental presence of God in his Creation.¹²¹ Prayers of the ancient liturgy of the Latin Church also come to mind, with texts composed in a lan-

¹¹⁹ *Praefatio* 41: (my soul in her songs) *labem, Roma, tuis inferat idolis*.

¹²⁰ Kah 1990 (n. 109). Prudentius' *romanitas* is also emphasized strongly (too strongly?) by Mönnich (n. 44) 181-97.

¹²¹ We may think of religious poets such as G. Herbert and G.M. Hopkins (Herbert, Sonnet II, 4-7: "Each cloud distills Thy praise ... Roses and lilies speak Thee"; Hopkins, The wreck of the Deutschland, st. 35: "Our King back, oh, upon English souls! Let Him easter in us, be a dayspring to the dimness of us, be a crimson-cresseted east"). One of the most formidable "sacramental" poets is the Flemish poet G. Gezelle, with poems like "Het schrijverke": "Wij schrijven, herschrijven en schrijven nog de heilige name van God" and "Als de ziele luistert": "Als de ziele luistert, spreekt het al een taal dat leeft wind en wee en wolken, wegelen van Gods heilige voet, talen en vertolken 't diep gedoken Woord zo zoet". We may also quote the Dutch poetess Ida Gerhardt with "Dichterspreuken I" uit "Het Sterreschip": ... "Dat wat een vers tot een vers maakt is niet van sterfelijke oorsprong. Wie dichter is zorgt dat hij staan laat, mijn zoon, wat niët van zijn hand is".

guage akin to that of poetry, as in the prayer for Holy Communion, *Quod ore sumpsimus, Domine, mente capiamus, et de munere temporali fiat nobis remedium sempiternum*.¹²² Here, too, we see a direct passage from the earthly to the heavenly world (from mouth to soul—a temporal gift bestowing eternal healing), the earthly things being sacramental and in essence bearers of grace.

It must be granted, of course, that it is highly attractive for a poet to recognize something divine in our earthly condition, as things acquire an extraordinary depth when sung against such a background. That does raise the question, however, whether such a form of sacrament is an actual reality or simply a figure of speech, intended to heighten the forcefulness of the expression. Is it perhaps no more than a concise, hence concentrated, metaphor which identifies the cock metaphorically with Christ because he fulfils the role of Christ when he crows, depicting Christ's awakening of Mankind?

Put in this way, the dilemma is perhaps too sharply defined as antithesis, for poetry tends to blur the outlines. Yet, I get the impression that modern Prudentian research presents a double interpretation approximately along the lines described above. Either the allegorical, referential, character of the poetry is emphasized, or the sacramental character, presenting as it does the divine in human terms on the basis of a fundamental kinship. If I understand him correctly, Herzog maintains the allegorical interpretation in his study on Prudentius' poetry as allegory,¹²³ formulations such as "the Prudentian allegory as expression of the unity of Bible and World" and "the unity of God's biblical and post-biblical operations"¹²⁴ notwithstanding. To him, Prudentius' *œuvre* is a network of references, coordinated so as to reveal biblical and Christian values in human life. After Herzog, Marion van Assendelft in particular treated the problem in the introduction to her commentary on Prudentius' morning and evening hymns.¹²⁵ She assesses very carefully how, within the texture of

¹²² *Sacramentarium Veronense* 531: cf. L.C. Mohlberg-L. Eizenhöfer-P. Siffrin, *Sacramentarium Veronense (Cod. Bibl. Capit. Veron. LXXXV [80])* (Rerum Ecclesiasticarum Documenta. Series Maior. Fontes I; Roma 1956) 70.

¹²³ R. Herzog, *Die allegorische Dichtkunst des Prudentius* (Zetemata 42, München 1966).

¹²⁴ "Die Prudentianische Allegorie als Ausdruck der Einheit von Bibel und Welt"; "Einheit von biblischem und nachbiblischem Handeln Gottes": ib. 13-41 *passim*. The formula "The art of sacramental allegory" ("Die Kunst der sakramentalen Allegorie" 43) must not deceive us: the author means to say that the sacrament in the strict sense (in particular the Eucharist) also has a referential function, viz. to indicate unity in faith.

¹²⁵ M.M. van Assendelft 1976 (n. 13) 13-29.

the hymns, the argument starting from and revolving around a central biblical passage unfolds in a pattern in which image and reality, earthly symbol and spiritual substance, relate to each other without converging into one perspective.

Opposite both her careful analyses and Fuhrmann's explanatory notes on the first hymn of the *Cathemerinon*, *Ad galli cantum*,¹²⁶ Gnilka explicitly stresses his conviction that perceiving the analogy between the natural and the supernatural world, observing earthly things as being in essence tokens of the divine, is crucial to the interpretation of Prudentius.¹²⁷ When Prudentius uses the term *signum* this is not a stylistic reference, he says, not a figure of speech, but a "figure of Nature".¹²⁸ The title of Gnilka's study: "The symbolism of Nature in Prudentius' Hymns of the Daily Round" means just that. Apart from Buchheit who, in a study on the initial stanzas of Prudentius' hymn for Christmas, *Cathemerinon* 11,¹²⁹ expresses his full agreement with Gnilka's view, scholars seldom discuss the issue. I do not venture to take a stand, but I express the hope that questions concerning this problem will receive due attention in future studies of poetics.

The reception of Prudentius

The final topic is one that, happily, can no longer be omitted, viz. Prudentius' "Nachleben", his reception. The great historian of European civilization, E.R. Curtius, wrote his penfriend, the poet T.S. Eliot, in 1939 that he was at that moment occupied with "the Latin literature that stretches from Prudentius to Dante",¹³⁰ thereby implying that Prudentius' poetry played an important part both at the passage from Antiquity to the Middle Ages, and during the Middle Ages. Marion van Assendelft, partly relying on research on Prudentius' "Nachleben" by E.B. Vest,¹³¹ presents us

¹²⁶ M. Fuhrmann, "Ad galli cantum. Ein Hymnus des Prudentius als Paradigma christlicher Dichtung", *Der altsprachliche Unterricht* 14,3 (1971) 82-106.

¹²⁷ Chr. Gnilka, "Die Natursymbolik in den Tagesliedern des Prudentius", in *Pietas. Festschrift Bernhard Kötting* ed. E. Dassman - K. Suso Frank (*JbAC* Ergänzungsband 8; Münster 1980) 411-46.

¹²⁸ "Figur der Natur": ib. 416.

¹²⁹ V. Buchheit, "Sonnewende - Geburt des Sol verus (Prud. cath. 11, 1-12)", *WS* 99 (1986) 245-59, esp. 250 n. 32.

¹³⁰ Quoted in: P. Godman, "T.S. Eliot - E.R. Curtius. A European Dialogue", *Liber* 1,1 (1989) 5-7, esp. 7. E.K. Rand sees the same poets as marking an era of European civilization (cf. n. 104).

¹³¹ See M.M. van Assendelft 1976 (n. 13) 7-9. On 9 n. 45, she mentions E.B. Vest, *Prudentius in the Middle Ages* (Harvard Univ. Diss. 1932; typewritten, put in microcards in Chicago, 1956). I did not consult Vest's study.

with information on the poet's reception. I refer to her book, while adding some information about borrowings from Prudentius by later writers, as I found it scattered throughout studies in books and reviews.

We must start with the reputation of Prudentius in his lifetime, where the first problem to arise concerns the possible relationship between Prudentius and Augustine. Augustine was Prudentius' junior by a few years, but he survived him by at least twenty years. His early works, particularly the *Confessiones*, may have been read by Prudentius. It is far likelier, however, that Prudentius' *œuvre*, or part of it, was read by him. Speculations about possible influences of the *Psychomachia* on Augustine's discourse on peace in *De ciuitate dei* 19,10 ff. were already plentiful in the nineteenth century. S. Merkle and P. Allard opted for a dependence, but the two great Prudentius specialists of the last decades of the nineteenth century, A. Rösler and Cl. Brockhaus, denied this.¹³² Of more recent scholars, Cunningham notes another possible borrowing from the *Psychomachia* in *De ciuitate dei* 19 in his edition. He also sees a dependence or affinity between the end of the *Psychomachia* and *Enarratio in psalmum* 46,10.¹³³ In a recent study Danuta Shanzer takes for granted that Augustine's text in *De ciuitate* 19 is the first external testimony for the *Psychomachia*.¹³⁴ On the relations between the two great authors, both inspired to such a degree by religious fervour, the final word certainly has not yet been spoken, but to tackle this problem with any chance of success a thorough familiarity with both Prudentius and Augustine—no small matter—will be needed. A question that will certainly recur was mentioned by J.-L. Charlet, with reference to analogies between the *Cathemerinon* and Augustine's *Epistula* 102: he points out that in many cases such analogies can be accounted for by a borrowing from the same exegetical and theological traditions.¹³⁵

Possibly pope Leo the Great betrays knowledge of the *Psychomachia* in one of his sermons, as Gnilka observes.¹³⁶ After Leo, knowledge of Prudentius' works in Antiquity has been estab-

¹³² See I. Rodríguez-Herrera 1981 (n. 70) 142 n. 255; same information in A. Kurfes, *RE* 23,1 (1957) 1063.

¹³³ See edition (n. 1) 176.181.

¹³⁴ Shanzer 1989 *ICS* (n. 48) 362.

¹³⁵ J.-L. Charlet, "Prudence et la Bible", *RecAug* 18 (1983) 3-149, esp. 133 n. 822.

¹³⁶ Leo Magnus *Sermo* 18, 2 (CCSL 138,73-4): cf. Gnilka 1979 (n. 40) 179 n. 96.

lished for Sidonius Apollinaris, Avitus, Gennadius, Isidore of Seville and Gregory of Tours. Interested as he was in Prudentius' "Nachleben", M. Lavarenne, the French editor-translator of Prudentius' *œuvre*, compiled the passages in question from these authors.¹³⁷ Furthermore, in the second half of the first millennium AD, the Spanish Mozarabic and the Roman liturgy admitted parts of Prudentius' hymns into their euchological repertory.¹³⁸

To ascertain Prudentius' popularity in the Middle Ages, one need but consult, under the *lemma* Prudentius, the indices of that inexhaustible source of information, the three volumes of M. Manitius' History of the Latin literature of the Middle Ages, a work that was published from 1911 to 1931, assembling the material on Prudentius up to and including the first quarter of this century. A comparison with the *lemma* Augustine in the indices of the same work demonstrates that Prudentius matches the great African as regards the number of quotations in the Middle Ages.¹³⁹ Before Manitius, F.A. Specht and M. Grabmann had pointed out that Prudentius' name turns up continually in the medieval library catalogues, indicating that he was much read and studied in the medieval schools, and served with Virgil as a model for young and talented apprentices.¹⁴⁰ In the present century it is, after Manitius, again Lavarenne who provides us with much information.¹⁴¹

A systematic perusal of qualifying bibliographical documentation (e.g. the great register of *Archiv für Liturgiewissenschaft* 1921-1941; the annual volumes of *Bulletin de Théologie Ancienne et Médiévale*, *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses*, *Bulletin Signalétique Histoire et Science des Religions*, *Religion Index of the American Theological Association*) will no doubt prove very fruitful for research in this

¹³⁷ M. Lavarenne, *Prudence. I Cathemerinon (Livre d'Heures)* (Paris 1955) XVII. See also M.C. Díaz y Díaz, "Prudencio en la Hispania Visigótica", in *Corona Gratiarum. Miscellanea Eligius Dekkers I-II* (Instrumenta Patristica 10-11; Brugge's-Gravenhage 1975) II, 61-70. M.M. van Assendelft 1976 (n. 13) 9, mentions also Cassian, Cyprian of Gaul, Claudius Marius Victor, Sedulius, Petrus Chrysologus and Orientius.

¹³⁸ See Díaz y Díaz 1975 (n. 137) and A.S. Walpole, *Early Latin Hymns. With Introduction and Notes* (Cambridge 1922 = Hildesheim 1966) 117-48.

¹³⁹ Cf. M. Manitius, *Geschichte der lateinischen Literatur des Mittelalters* I (München 1911) 729 and 755; II (München 1923) 832 and 860; III (München 1931) 1091 and 1141.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. F.A. Specht, *Geschichte des Unterrichtswesens in Deutschland von den ältesten Zeiten bis zur Mitte des dreizehnten Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart 1885) 98.103.113-114.268; M. Grabmann, *Die Geschichte der scholastischen Methode* I-II (Freiburg im Breisgau 1909-1911) II, 61.63.

¹⁴¹ Lavarenne 1955 (n. 137) XVII-XXI; id., *Prudence. III Psychomachie. Contre Symmaque* (Paris 1948) 25-46.

field. I did a very superficial sounding over the past twenty-five years and found studies on Prudentian influence in Bede,¹⁴² Dhuoda,¹⁴³ Hildegard of Bingen¹⁴⁴ and the French "chansons de geste".¹⁴⁵

All of Prudentius' poetry enjoyed great popularity in the Middle Ages, but the *Psychomachia* was cherished most as is shown by studies on Anglo-Saxon manuscripts¹⁴⁶ and on translations into Old English.¹⁴⁷ When judging the medieval predilection for this work one must consult Gnilka's monograph on the *Psychomachia* with its explanations on the allegorical figures of virtues and vices locked in battle.¹⁴⁸ Equally important are the observations of Jauss that our notion of the "abstract", evoking as it does the idea of lifelessness and bloodlessness, is not easily applicable to the Prudentian personification of virtues and vices.¹⁴⁹ In the eyes of Prudentius and his medieval readers the *Psychomachia* was the enactment of the history of Salvation, a religious drama affecting Man's innermost being. In the arts of the Middle Ages such as sculpture and illumination, and continuing in the art forms of the Renaissance and Baroque these allegorical figures created by Prudentius were felt to be very alive and were reproduced in all kinds of shapes.¹⁵⁰ Thus Prudentius also contributed indirectly to the glories of Western civilization.

¹⁴² D. Whitbread, "The Sources and Literary Qualities of Bede's Doomsday Verses", *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 95 (1966) 258-66.

¹⁴³ Bernadette Janssens, "L'influence de Prudence sur le Liber Manualis de Dhuoda", *SP* 17,3 (1982) 1366-73.

¹⁴⁴ B.W. Horeski, «*Ordo Virtutum*»: Hildegard of Bingen's Liturgical Morality Play, cf. *Dissertation Abstracts* 30A (1969-1970) 4946-7.

¹⁴⁵ Alison G. Elliott, "The Martyr an Epic Hero: Prudentius' Peristephanon and the Old French Chanson de geste", *Proceedings of the PMR Conference* 3 (Villanova 1978) 119-35.

¹⁴⁶ G.R. Wieland, "The Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts of Prudentius' *Psychomachia*", in *Anglo-Saxon England* 16 ed. P. Clemoes (Cambridge 1987) 213-31.

¹⁴⁷ J.P. Hermann, "Some Varieties of *Psychomachia* in Old English" I, *The American Benedictine Review* 34 (1983) 74-86.

¹⁴⁸ Gnilka 1963 (n. 24) *passim*.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. H.R. Jauss, "Form und Auffassung der Allegorie in der Tradition der *Psychomachia* (Von Prudentius zum ersten Romanz de la Rose)", in *Medium Aevum Vivum. Festschrift für Walter Bulst* ed. H.R. Jauss - D. Schaller (Heidelberg 1960) 179-206: see in particular 188-9.

¹⁵⁰ See Gnilka 1979 (n. 40) 152, with references in the note to studies of the history of art; see also Lavarenne 1948 (n. 141) 41-5.

IMITATION CRÉATIVE DANS LE *CARMEN PASCHALE* DE SÉDULIUS

par

P.W.A.Th. VAN DER LAAN

1. L'AUTEUR ET SON ŒUVRE

Sédulius, le poète-prêtre,¹ qui vécut dans la première moitié du V^e siècle, était, d'après la plupart des souscriptions dans les manuscrits, de descendance italienne. Selon Aethilwald (VIII^e s.) et Paschase Radbert (785-860) il était d'origine romaine.² Vers l'an 430 il composa son chef-d'œuvre, le *Carmen Paschale*³ (= *CP*), un chant épique sur les merveilles réalisées par Dieu, qu'on trouve dans l'Écriture Sainte, notamment dans les Évangiles. Le poème respire un atmosphère très classique, grâce aux nombreux exemples d'*imitatio ueterum*, l'imitation de poètes classiques, entre lesquels Virgile, Ovide et Lucain. Plus tard l'auteur a fait de son propre poème une paraphrase en prose, à laquelle il donna le nom d'*Opus Paschale*. Deux hymnes, dont l'un est intitulé *Cantemus socii dominum* et l'autre *A solis ortus cardine*, complètent l'œuvre littéraire de notre poète.

Dans sa lettre à son conseiller Macédonius notre poète recon-

¹ Sédulius lui-même rend témoignage de son état clérical par une référence à son habitude de chanter des psaumes dans le chœur, *CP* 1,23-25 *Dauitidis adsuetus cantibus odas / cordarum resonare decem sanctoque uerenter / stare choro et placidis caelestia psallere uerbis*. Il est appelé *presbyter* par Isidore et Bède le Vénéral et dans plusieurs souscriptions.

² Dans son *epistula dedicatoria* à son mentor spirituel, le prêtre Macédonius (= *1 Ep.Mac.*, texte chez Huemer, CSEL 10,1-13), Sédulius connaît bien deux femmes, Syncletice et Perpetua, qui appartiennent à une maison sénatoriale à Rome, *1 Ep.Mac.* 9,5-7; 10,6-11. En plus il n'est pas sans intérêt qu'Astérius, le grand consul de Rome, s'est occupé d'une édition spéciale du *CP*.

³ Texte chez Huemer, CSEL 10,14-146. Quant au titre, voir l'explication donnée par Sédulius dans *1 Ep.Mac.* 9-10 *Paschalis carminis nomen imposui, quia pascha nostrum immolatus est Christus*, cf. Springer 19.—N.B. Les noms de savants renvoyent aux publications mentionnées dans la bibliographie à la fin de l'article.

naît avoir été intéressé d'abord aux *saecularia studia*, pendant une période où il appliqua ses aptitudes à une activité littéraire peu sérieuse, pas à Dieu.⁴ Il s'en est repenti et revint à Dieu,⁵ et d'un chrétien qui n'était intéressé qu'à la *philosophia* païenne,⁶ il devint un chrétien aimant la *diuina scientia*.⁷ Dès ce moment il se sentit poussé par une émotion profondément sincère à chanter les merveilles de Dieu. Se taire plus longtemps serait un acte reprochable.⁸ Et malgré le fait qu'il désavoua les plaisirs de sa vie antérieure d'écrivain séculier, c'était son éducation mondaine qui lui permit de composer une épopée sur les merveilles de Dieu. La poésie païenne l'avait imprégné, notamment celle de Virgile, qui lui donna l'instrument indispensable pour réaliser son but.

Quant à la date du *CP*: beaucoup de souscriptions disent que Sédulius a écrit son poème à l'époque de Théodose II et Valentinien III, c'est-à-dire entre 425 et 450. Vu la préoccupation de notre auteur avec des thèmes comme la divinité et les deux natures de Jésus-Christ et la figure de la Vierge Marie, on est justifié à placer le *floruit* de Sédulius autour du Concile d'Ephèse de l'an 431.⁹ Dans son éloge de la maternité de Marie en relation avec la divinité du Christ, *CP* 2,63-66 *salue sancta parens, enixa puerpera*

⁴ 1 *Ep. Mac.* 2,4 *cum saecularibus .. studiis occupatus uim .. ingenii .. non utilitati animae, sed inani uitae dependerem et litterariae sollertia disciplinae lusibus infructuosi operis, non auctori deseruiret.*

⁵ Parfois les copistes médiévaux croient qu'il s'agit d'une conversion de païen à chrétien: ainsi le *codex Vat. Pal.* 242 de Prudence *laicus gentilis, .. dein ad dominum conuersus, a Macedonio presbytero baptizatus*. Voir aussi le *Carmen de Sedulio*, 2b, v. 12 (par Belisarius et Liberatus, texte chez Huemer CSEL 10,309-310), où est décrit le sentiment religieux d'autrefois de notre poète comme une croyance païenne: *irrita polluti contemnens numina mundi*.

⁶ Fontaine 1981, 248: "Sédulius fut d'abord ... un chrétien mondain."

⁷ Comme Sédulius dit à Macédonius, 1 *Ep. Mac.* 2,11-12, *deus fatuum prudentiae mortalis ingenium caelesti sale condidit*. L'idée est exprimée dans plusieurs manuscrits, p.e. ms. G (IX^e s.) *postea .. totum se ad deum contulit et omne studium quod ante habuerat in illis saecularibus disciplinis, conuertit ad diuinas scripturas*, ms. Y (X^e s.) *fuit enim primo laicus seculari sapientiae deditus; postea ad deum conuersus scripsit hunc librum*: ainsi dans l'*Expositio in Paschale Carmen* de Rémigius (IX^e s.).

⁸ 1 *Ep. Mac.* 3,2-5 *onus Christi, quod leue nimis est, humili pronus deuotione conplectens, culpa me scilicet arbitratus silentii non carere si studiosae mentis officium, quod uanitati detulissem, ueritati denegarem*, ib. 4,2-5 *nefas esse pensabam muti tenacitate silentii cum nullo partiri, ne unius talenti creditam quantitatem dum nitor cautius custodire, culpa defossae pecuniae non carerem*. Donnini 433-434 discute ce thème comme un élément du programme poétique de Sédulius.

⁹ Voir Bastiaensen 388. Frede 540 date non seulement le *Carmen* d'environ 431, mais aussi l'*Opus*, de même que les deux lettres à Macédonius. Quant à la date de la composition et de l'édition du *CP* voir Huemer 1876, 500-505. J'ai examiné amplement la question de la date dans l'introduction de mon étude du quatrième livre du *CP*, p. vii-xi.

regem etc.,¹⁰ la Sainte Vierge est représentée implicitement comme *Theotokos*, pas seulement comme *Christotokos*,¹¹ ce qui peut être considéré comme une attaque directe au dualisme de Nestorius. Voilà pourquoi on peut voir dans la composition du *CP* une réaction orthodoxe contre certaines hérésies de la tradition antiochéenne, qui visaient à saper le dogme de la divinité de Jésus-Christ.

Le poème eut rapidement une grande popularité qui durerait jusqu'au XVII^e siècle:¹² il y a des réminiscences chez Paulin de Pelle, Paulin de Périgueux et chez d'autres auteurs du V^e siècle.¹³ Déjà en 495 ou peu après Astérius a fait publier une réédition,¹⁴ le clarissime qui fit paraître presque en même temps la belle édition de luxe de l'*Enéide*, aujourd'hui le *codex Laur.* 39.1 à Florence, un parallélisme significatif. Le *CP* reçut des louanges dans le *Decretum de libris recipiendis*,¹⁵ attribué au pape Gélase et qui date d'environ 500. Vénance Fortunat,¹⁶ qui donne l'épithète *dulcis* à notre poète, le fait compagnon d'Ambroise, Jérôme et Augustin. Dans la description de la bibliothèque d'Isidore de Séville l'œuvre de Sédulius est chaudement recommandée auprès des lecteurs comme égalant, sinon dépassant les œuvres des poètes classiques. Dans les manuscrits son nom n'est pas seulement pourvu des qualifications *sanctus* et, dans une édition de

¹⁰ Cf. Virgile *Enéide* 5,80 *salve sancte parens*. Les v. 63-64 de l'éloge sédulien ont été repris dans la liturgie grégorienne, où ils figurèrent pendant des siècles dans l'*introitus* de plusieurs messes votives de la Sainte Vierge. Après avoir passé par la restauration liturgique, l'hymne n'est chantée aujourd'hui qu'à l'*introitus* du 1 janvier, à la fête de Marie, Mère de Dieu. En plus on retrouve les v. 63-68 du *Carmen*, dans une forme légèrement changée, dans le bréviaire romain à l'office de Noël et à celui du dimanche après Noël, dans l'antienne *Genuit puerpera regem*, voir Bastiaensen 388-397.

¹¹ Voir aussi Hymne 2,3-4 *Christum canamus principem / natum Maria uirgine*, ib. 13-14 *domus pudici pectoris / templum repente fit Dei* (sc. le sein de Marie). La nature divine de Jésus-Christ en relation avec sa mère est exprimée avec emphase dans *CP* 2,35-40 *uterumque puellae / sidereum mox implet onus, rerumque creator / nascendi sub lege fuit; stupet innuba tensos / uirgo sinus gaudetque suum paritura parentem*.

¹² Pour cette popularité et la réception de Sédulius, se manifestant dans le grand nombre de manuscrits et les nombreuses citations, voir Huemer 1878, 51-64 et Springer 128-150, qui donnent une longue série d'endroits.

¹³ Voir Springer 128.

¹⁴ Vraisemblablement une édition de luxe, cf. p.e. la souscription dans Par. 14143 *ad omnem elegantiam diuulgatum est a Turcio Rufio Asterio*.

¹⁵ Von Dobschütz c. 4 *item uenerabilis uiri Sedulii opus paschale, quod heroicis descripsit uersibus, insigni laude praeferimus*. Quant à la date voir Huemer 1878, 35: "ex codicum auctoritate uerisimile est anno 496 decretum illud prodiisse." Gélase I fut pape 492-496. Qu'on ne prenne pas au sérieux la datation de 454 de Corsaro 11 et 59!

¹⁶ *Carmen* 8,1,59 (MGH AA 4,180). Cf. *Vita Martini* 1,18 (MGH AA 4,296) *hinc quoque conspici radiavit lingua Seduli*.

1517, *diuus*, mais aussi du prénom de *Caelius*, 'le Céleste'.¹⁷ Des coryphées médiévaux, entre lesquels Bède le Vénérable, Alcuin, Hraban Maure, le citent sans cesse. Et en plus de l'adoption du *Salve sancta parens* dans la liturgie de la messe et dans l'office de Noël,¹⁸ on retrouve aussi dans le bréviaire romain une adaptation de onze strophes de l'hymne abécédaire *A solis ortus cardine*. Après avoir connu une grande popularité pendant le Moyen Âge et la Renaissance, l'épopée sédulienne tomba dans l'oubli pendant le XVII^e siècle. Un joli spécimen de la réception de Sédulius je le trouvai récemment par hasard dans le musée de Boymans-van Beuningen à Rotterdam: une gravure¹⁹ qui représente le Christ portant la croix à Golgotha (Mt. 27,31-32), publiée chez Hieronymus Cock, dans son atelier 'Aux Quatre Vents' à Anvers, en l'an 1556. Sous la gravure il y a le texte suivant, emprunté au cinquième livre du *CP*:

Vincitur insano patrum plebisque tumultu
Pontius atque lupis agnum dat praeses iniquus;
cumque datus saevis ad poenam Sanctus abiret
militibus, chlamydem rubri subtegmine cocci
uestitur uilem, species ut cuncta cruentae
mortis imago foret; spinis circumdedit alnum
nexa corona caput, quoniam spineta benignus
omnia nostrorum susceperat ille malorum.

Pontius est vaincu par le tumulte frénétique des anciens et du peuple, et le gouverneur inique livre l'agneau aux loups. Et quand le Saint, livré aux soldats féroces, s'achemina afin qu'il subit sa peine, on le revêtit d'une chlamyde vile, tissée de pourpre rouge, pour que toute son apparence fût une image de sa mort sanglante. Sur sa tête noble était placée une couronne d'épines, parce que cet homme bénin s'était chargé de toutes les épines de nos péchés.²⁰

Après l'introduction des premiers deux vers, les hexamètres v. 3-8 proviennent littéralement²¹ du cinquième livre du *CP* (164-

¹⁷ P.e. dans Par. 14143 (IX^e s.), Reg. 1 (X^e s.), Reg. 5 (XVI^e s.).

¹⁸ Voir n. 10.

¹⁹ Numéro d'inventaire: L.1987/22. Pour une description de la gravure, avec planche, voir p. 24 du catalogue de l'exposition 'In de Vier Winden' (Rotterdam 1988), de la main de Mme Jacqueline Burgers.

²⁰ Les vers font allusion au Christ aux outrages (Mt. 27,27-29) et ne s'appliquent pas, à proprement parler, à l'image qui représente le Christ portant sa croix en route pour Golgotha (Mt. 27,31-32).

²¹ Le texte montre quelques variations peu importantes à l'égard du texte dans l'édition de Huemer: *uilem* et *chlamydem* ont changé de place dans la version de Cock, un phénomène attesté aussi dans quelques manuscrits du *CP*. Au lieu de *cruentae* (Cock), attesté par la *manus secunda* de quelques manuscrits,

169), livre qui traite de la passion, de la mort et de la résurrection du Christ. Autant que je sache, cette réminiscence sédulienne n'a pas encore été signalée.

2. LE CARMEN PASCHALE: FORME PAÏENNE, CONTENU CHRÉTIEN

Le *CP* est une épopée biblique en cinq livres.²² Les livres 2-4 contiennent les *miracula Christi*, pour la description desquels notre poète a utilisé tous les quatre évangiles,²³ suivant une méthode spéciale d'arrangement.²⁴ La *narratio* (le Christ faisant ses miracles en s'acheminant à travers la Terre Sainte) a un air très épique notamment par la forme virgilienne, qui marque fortement le poème. En même temps la narration est saturée de remarques exégétiques, parénétiques ou moralisantes et d'explications allégoriques, qui montrent que le poète était influencé par des commentaires bibliques, écrits dans les premiers siècles chrétiens. Il y a des rapports évidents avec des œuvres de Clément d'Alexandrie, Origène,²⁵ Jérôme, Augustin et autres.²⁶ Mais, quelque saillante que soit parfois la correspondance, jamais on ne peut en conclure avec certitude que le poète a vraiment lu le commentaire d'Hippolyte, Hilaire ou Ambroise.²⁷ La dépendance de tels commentaires, cependant, ne sera pas examinée dans cet ex-

Huemer lit, avec les meilleurs manuscrits, *cruenta*. Au lieu d'*almum* les manuscrits ont *amplum*.

²² Quant au genre de l'épopée biblique voir entre autres les études de Herzog et de Kartschoke.

²³ I *Ep.Mac.* 12,4-7 *quatuor .. mirabilium diuinorum libellos, quos ex pluribus pauca complexus usque ad passionem et resurrectionem ascensionemque .. Christi quatuor euangeliorum dicta congregans ordinauit.*

²⁴ Loin d'être simplement chronologique, comme le pense p.e. Springer 51, la méthode est beaucoup plus complexe. Je l'ai étudiée minutieusement dans l'introduction, p. xvii-xxi, de mon étude du quatrième livre du *CP*.

²⁵ Dans sa deuxième lettre à Macédonius 2 *Ep.Mac.* 172,12 (texte chez Huemer CSEL 10,171-174), qui accompagne l'*Opus Paschale*, Sédulius parle d'Origène avec égard.

²⁶ Un bon exemple est l'explication de l'épisode de l'aveugle-né (*CP* 4,251-270 = Jn. 9,1-39): selon notre poète la cécité représente allégoriquement la condition humaine, devenue peccable en conséquence du péché originel, la boue est le limon dont le Christ fut incarné, l'eau de Siloé correspond au baptême: on trouve ici des rapports avec l'*Aduersus Haereses* 5,15,2-3 d'Irénée, l'*Expositio in Ioannem* 582 de Fortunatien et avec le *Tractatus in Ioannis Euangelium* 44 d'Augustin.

²⁷ Quelques autres commentaires dont Sédulius, qui connaissait le grec, a pu prendre connaissance sont ceux d'Hippolyte *In euangelium Ioannis et in resurrectionem Lazari* (édition Achelis), d'Ambroise *Expositio in Lucam et Exameron*, d'Augustin *Quaestiones Euangeliorum*, *Sermones* 56, 57, 58 et 59, et *De sermone dei in monte*, et les commentaires sur Matthieu d'Origène, de Jérôme et d'Hilaire.

posé, de même que l'œuvre de Sédulius ne sera pas envisagée ici du point de vue dogmatique, exégétique ou de l'histoire religieuse. Tout intéressantes que sont les questions qui traitent de la méthode dont le poète se sert du matériel biblique—ce qu'il omet, ce qu'il ajoute—, je n'en parlerai point. Est-ce que le poète a utilisé une harmonie des évangiles, de la même tradition que le *Diatessaron*, ou une synopse, comme celle d'Ammonius ou d'Eusèbe? Non, mais l'argumentation a eu lieu ailleurs.²⁸ Et malgré la grande importance de la constatation surprenante que notre poète ne semble pas s'être servi de la *Vulgata*, mais d'un texte de la *Vetus Latina*, on ne trouvera pas ici mes arguments qui soutiennent cette supposition.²⁹ Ici, je voudrais me limiter à un seul élément de caractère littéraire: la façon dont Sédulius se sert de son grand prédécesseur Virgile et d'autres auteurs non-chrétiens, comment il les imite et les utilise, parfois habilement, comme un moyen de parvenir à ses fins chrétiennes.

Le *Carmen* de Sédulius est une synthèse de forme païenne et de contenu chrétien, comme les œuvres de tous les poètes épiques chrétiens latins.³⁰ Après avoir attaqué d'abord férocelement la poésie profane avec ses frivolités, ses mensonges si pernicioeux pour l'âme,³¹ les chrétiens ont trouvé peu à peu une espèce de symbiose, autant inévitable que fructueuse. Voici la naissance du chrétien lettré, qui rejette la littérature profane dangereuse et mensongère, tandis qu'en même temps il en embrasse l'utilité et la beauté: on trouve ce principe d'*odi et amo* chez de nombreux auteurs chrétiens.³² On est permis d'emporter les vaisseaux d'or et d'argent de l'ennemi, comme dit Augustin,³³ pourvu qu'on les remplisse de vin pur d'appellation chrétienne. L'apparat et le style de la rhétorique ancienne sont justifiés comme moyen au profit de la propagation de la foi chrétienne³⁴ et comme des armes avec lesquelles le paganisme peut être abattu. Ainsi, dès le

²⁸ Dans l'*Appendix* 2 de mon étude du quatrième livre du *CP*, p. 213-219, contre G. Moretti Pieri.

²⁹ Contre Mayr 95, Springer 110: voir l'*Appendix* 1 de mon étude du quatrième livre du *CP*, p. 204-212.

³⁰ Juvencus, Cyprianus Gallus, Claudius Marius Victor, Dracontius, Avit, Arator, voir Roberts 74-106, Springer 5-6.

³¹ Le *topos* de la supercherie—*figmenta, falsa, uana, mendacia*—des sujets mythologiques dans la littérature païenne, est exprimé p.e. par Paulin de Nole *Carmen* 10,33-42, Juvencus *prooemium* 15-20, Augustin *Confessiones* 1,17. Sédulius s'en occupe *CP* 1,17-26. Voir Donnini 428-430.

³² Voir p.e. De Labriolle 14-37.

³³ *De doctrina christiana* 2 XL/60.

³⁴ Parmi beaucoup d'autres c'est Juvencus 4,802-805 qui déclare que le contenu de son poème biblique convient bien aux *ornamenta terrestria linguae*.

IV^e siècle, la voie est libre pour l'acceptation de l'ornement poétique: les premiers fruits d'une poésie chrétienne naissent, conciliation entre l'éducation antique et la production de littérature chrétienne.³⁵ Ainsi Sédulius a pu utiliser sans scrupules l'héritage païen, les moyens d'expression de la poésie antique, afin de chanter les miracles du Christ. Il s'excuse, cependant, auprès de ses lecteurs de son usage des *carminum uoluptates*, les délices de la poésie, en pensant que le lecteur s'y délectera plus et qu'il se souviendra mieux de son message enveloppé dans une forme si douce.³⁶ Lui aussi se dresse d'abord, traditionnellement, contre des *figmenta* et des *scelerum monumenta* des héros mythologiques de l'épopée profane, au lieu desquels il chantera les *clara salutiferi miracula Christi*.³⁷ Pas de *magnae res* de l'épopée profane, pas de vaisseaux d'or ni des corbeilles de miel odorant, garnies de diamants, mais un repas frugal de légumes simples, cultivés dans un jardin pauvre, servi en faïence rude et rouge.³⁸ Mais, dans ce rejet de la forme luxueuse de l'épopée païenne, il ne s'agit que d'un cliché: en effet c'est avec ardeur que notre poète s'adonne à l'embellissement de son poème avec les formes élégantes de la poésie classique. Le *Carmen Paschale* avec son abondance de réminiscences virgiliennes³⁹ donne une réponse claire à la question pathétique de Jérôme: *Quid cum euangeliis Maro?* C'était Virgile dont l'autorité restait inviolable, parmi les auteurs chrétiens aussi, c'était Virgile avec qui Sédulius, comme élève et plus tard comme *grammaticus*, était associé dès sa jeunesse.

³⁵ Pour ce comportement ambivalent des *patres* à l'égard de l'éducation traditionnelle, voir entre autres Hagendahl 311, Van der Nat 1963, 11, Kartschoke 20-28, Roberts 62-63, Springer 71.

³⁶ *1 Ep. Mac.* 5,4 *multi sunt quos studiorum saecularium disciplina per poeticas magis delicias et carminum uoluptates oblectat. Hi quicquid rhetoricae facundiae perlegunt, neglegentius adsequuntur, quoniam haud diligunt; quod autem uersuum uident blandimento mellitum, tanta cordis auuiditate suscipiunt, ut in alta memoria saepius haec iterando constituent et reponant.*

³⁷ Dans *1 Ep. Mac.* 3,4-5 il oppose la *ueritas* de la littérature chrétienne à la *uanitas* de la littérature profane.

³⁸ Cf. 2 Co. 4,7. Dans *CP* 1,17-21 notre poète montre qu'il voit toujours une relation immédiate entre la forme élégante et le contenu fallacieux de la littérature païenne: *studeant figmenta poetae / grandisonis pompae modis tragicoque boatu / ridiculose Getae seu qualibet arte canendi / saeva nefandarum renouent contagia rerum / et scelerum monumenta canant*. Ces mots de critique rappellent le reproche traditionnel aux écrivains païens que leur langue et style gracieux ne servent qu'à cacher des discours mensongers.

³⁹ Huemer 1878, 65-101, Mayr 69-76 en donnent plus de 300: on en trouve plus dans l'*Appendix* 3 de mon étude du quatrième livre du *CP*, p. 220-224. Springer 77 fait mention de quelques passages du *CP* qui montrent des rapports indirects avec l'*Enéide*. Concernant l'influence virgilienne sur la poésie chrétienne voir, entre autres, Hudson-Williams 11-21, avec beaucoup d'exemples.

3. *IMITATIO VETERUM*a. *Virgile*

Le *CP* est-il donc une *Enéide* chrétienne? Oui et non! En effet on peut constater qu'au Christ est assigné le rôle d'Enée: comme le héros troyen il poursuit son chemin vers son noble but, tandis que ses gestes sublimes et divins l'emportent, aux yeux de Sédulius, sur les aventures bizarres du héros mortel. Ce n'est pas par hasard que le Christ du *CP* est caractérisé par *pietas*: celle-ci est évidemment un pendant divin de la *pietas* énéenne, la conscience religieuse qui le fait accomplir ses devoirs, grâce à laquelle il arrive à son but terrestre. Mais cette *pietas* d'Enée est surmontée par la pitié du Christ, la douce miséricorde, en un mot, par l'amour qui l'incite à faire ses miracles et, finalement, à créer, par sa mort sur la croix, la *salus* éternelle pour ceux qui le suivent.⁴⁰ L'histoire fausse d'un héros qui, en route vers son destin, se trouve aidé ou empêché par les dieux païens, doit céder le pas à la vérité dont témoignent les épisodes de l'évangile qui racontent les faits véritables de la vie du Christ. Dans son épopée Sédulius essaie de rivaliser avec le maître païen, même de le surpasser.⁴¹ On admettra sans peine que ses efforts ont bien réussi grâce à l'emploi créatif des parties diverses de l'*Enéide* elle-même. En utilisant le modèle de l'épique classique, notre poète chrétien présente à son prédécesseur païen, d'une façon provocatrice, la supériorité de la vérité évangélique sur les mythes faux de l'*Enéide*, à l'aide de ses propres moyens artistiques.

Ainsi le Christ, le héros de Sédulius, l'emporte sur Enée. Springer 80 donne un bel exemple de cette conviction de notre poète: la description de l'épisode du Christ apaisant la tempête sur la mer, Mt. 8,23-27. Notre poète, dans *CP* 3,64-69, non seulement présente le message simple de Matthieu dans une forme très épique, mais, en outre, il le présente d'une façon extrêmement virgilienne, en utilisant des éléments directement empruntés à une ou deux fameuses scènes de tempête de l'*Enéide*, de sorte qu'on reconnaît Enée et ses compagnons sur la mer d'Afrique, agitée par des vents impétueux.⁴² Mais apprécions le

⁴⁰ On ne peut pas exclure la supposition que Sédulius prend la *pietas* du Christ aussi dans le sens de 'conscience des devoirs envers son Père'.

⁴¹ Un motif pareil est exprimé par Juvénus dans la *Praefatio* 6-10 de son *Histoire Evangélique*. Concernant le rapport entre Sédulius et Juvénus, voir Costanza 253-286.

⁴² *Enéide* 1,81-123.

grand contraste entre l'impuissance d'Enée, le héros mortel, à l'égard des éléments, et la grande puissance calme du Christ, le héros divin. Voici ce que Sédulius veut dire au lecteur: abandonnez ce guide des Romains païens, qui mène à un but périssable et suivez le Christ qui mène avec succès toute l'humanité à la Terre promise, au salut éternel. Par cette méthode d'imitation la puissance du Christ est démontrée aux dépens de celle d'Enée.⁴³

Cependant, ce n'est pas seulement la supériorité du Christ sur Enée que Sédulius a voulu démontrer. Son dessein s'étend plus loin. Ce sont en général les dieux païens de la religion ancienne qu'il veut démolir. En plusieurs cas notre poète se sert créativement d'une espèce d'imitation contrastante⁴⁴ afin de montrer que la toute-puissance du Christ surmonte la puissance des dieux anciens qui ne valent plus rien ou qui sont incorporés aux démons malins qui figurent dans le Nouveau Testament. Malgré la couleur virgilienne du *CP* et la ressemblance du Christ avec Enée, on n'a pas le droit de caractériser le poème sédulien exclusivement comme une *Enéide* christianisée. Vu les exhortations pastorales et les digressions allégoriques, exégétiques et dogmatiques, entre autres les invectives lancées aux Ariens dont la narration est entrelacée,⁴⁵ on a raison de qualifier le *CP* comme une épopée biblique de caractère didactique,⁴⁶ plutôt que de parler d'un poème épique de caractère strictement narratif.

b. Ovide

Sédulius a voulu composer un poème qui serait plus qu'une christianisation de l'*Enéide*. Cette conclusion se présente aisément si on se rend compte que plusieurs descriptions des miracles ont

⁴³ Plus forte est la caractérisation de Kartschoke 20: "Aeneas, der Staatsheilige des römischen Reiches wird verdrängt und ersetzt durch Christus, den Heiland der Welt."

⁴⁴ Pour le terme de 'Kontrastimitation' voir Thraede 1039: "Die Übernahme von Junktur zum Zwecke gegenteiliger Aussagen wollen wir als Kontrastimitation bezeichnen; in ihr wird bewußt die christliche Lehre dem alten Epos konfrontiert."

⁴⁵ P.e. en attribuant à plusieurs reprises au Christ des qualifications qui appartiennent au Père, notre poète défend ardemment le dogme de la consubstantialité éternelle du Fils avec le Père. Voir aussi *CP* 4,207-208 *Christus ... cui dantur munera*, 308 *princeps in principe* et la tirade contre Arius et Sabellius dans *CP* 1,299-323. Implicitement la description du Christ comme *genitor, pater mundi, omnipotens* est aussi adressée à Marcion.

⁴⁶ Thraede 1023: "Das Carmen Paschale ... hat ... in Allegorese und Typologie sowie in den antihäretischen Formulierungen des ersten Buches und des Epilogs, auch das christliche Lehr-Epos verarbeitet."

une correspondance narratologique avec les *Métamorphoses* d'Ovide, dont le *CP* contient un assez grand nombre de réminiscences. Cette correspondance n'est pas difficile à comprendre: dans le cas des miracles du Nouveau Testament il s'agit aussi souvent d'une métamorphose: le malade guérit, l'eau change en vin, le mort devient vivant. Une de ces ressemblances narratologiques est le phénomène que Sédulius fait fréquemment mention de la réalisation immédiate d'un miracle: *confestim, subito*. Ainsi chez Ovide *Mét.* 6,140 Arachne est transformée en une araignée *extemplo* après l'action d'Athène et sur-le-champ les paysans lyciens aussi deviennent des grenouilles: *Mét.* 6,370 *eueniunt optata deae* immédiatement après la malédiction de Latone.⁴⁷ Il est vrai aussi que la narration de l'évangéliste montre fréquemment cet élément de métamorphose, ce qui est un phénomène intéressant du point de vue de l'histoire de la littérature, mais souvent Sédulius mentionne la réalisation d'un miracle comme ayant eu lieu sur-le-champ même si l'évangéliste n'en parle pas. Sans doute cet élément d'origine littéraire a reçu, aux yeux de notre poète, une valeur pastorale et parénétique. Un autre exemple d'influence ovidienne est le récit de la guérison des dix lépreux, *Lc.* 17,11-19, dans *CP* 4,198-201:

subito mundata uicissim
mirantur sua membra uiri uariumque tuentes
esse nihil sese pariter speculantur et omnes
explorant proprias alterno lumine formas.

Les hommes admirèrent les uns chez les autres la purification immédiate de leurs membres et s'apercevant qu'il n'y avait plus aucune bariolure, ils s'observèrent en même temps les uns les autres et tous examinèrent mutuellement leurs propres formes.

A part l'élément *subito*, c'est l'emploi du verbe *mirantur* qui frappe. Ovide l'utilise avec une certaine préférence, Bömer⁴⁸ le caractérise comme 'Terminologie der Metamorphose'. Chose remarquable est la mention prononcée et répétée—*tuentes, speculantur, explorant*—du fait que les hommes voient s'accomplir leur métamorphose, un phénomène vraiment ovidien: Philémon et Baucis aussi p.e. voient, l'un chez l'autre, leur transformation en arbre,⁴⁹ comme les meurtrières d'Orphée voient ce phénomène

⁴⁷ Pour les éléments stéréotypes de la métamorphose voir Quirin, Tableaux après p. 125.

⁴⁸ Commentaire sur Ovide *Métamorphoses* 2,353.

⁴⁹ *Mét.* 8,714-715 *frondere Philemona Baucis / Baucida conspexit ... Philemon.*

chez elles-mêmes.⁵⁰ Et enfin on reconnaît l'origine ovidienne des expressions *membra uiri*⁵¹ et *pariter speculantur et omnes*⁵² et du mot *formas*.⁵³ A ces observations on pourrait ajouter que le modèle dactylique de l'hexamètre sédulien ressemble plus à celui d'Ovide qu'à celui de Virgile. Sédulius préfère la métrique dactyle-spondée-dactyle-spondée (DSDS).⁵⁴ La métrique la plus pratiquée par Virgile, DSSS, n'occupe que la quatrième place chez Sédulius.

c. Lucain

Pas injustement le copiste du *codex Ambrosianus* J 35 fait le parallèle de notre poète avec Lucain: *scripsit Sedulius .. / laudes, Christe, tuas gesta quae caelica / Lucani similis uersibus arduis*. Springer 91 fait remarquer que pour notre poète dans le cas des 'authorial intrusions', des intrusions personnelles et passionnées de l'auteur dans le cours du récit, Lucain peut avoir servi d'exemple. Et ce n'est pas par hasard que dans un codex du IX^e siècle Sédulius se trouve accompagné de Lucain.⁵⁵ Outre qu'on trouve dans le *CP* en général des réminiscences lucaniennes éparses,⁵⁶ il y a un passage dans le *Bellum Civile* qui semble avoir fait une impression particulière sur le génie créateur de notre poète: c'est le long passage de la sorcière nommée Erichthon, du sixième livre du poème lucanien. Examinons la description sédulienne de l'épisode de la résurrection du fils de la veuve de Nain, Lc. 7,11-17. S'éloignant du récit évangélique notre poète fait retourner le cortège funèbre: *CP* 4,139-141 *mox agmine uerso / ... / candida felicem reuocauit pompa parentem*. Vraisemblablement il a été inspiré par la description de Lucain 6,531-532 concernant Erichthon qui enlève les morts de leur tombeau et les emporte, description où on retrouve cette image du cortège retourné: *peruersa funera pompa / rettulit a tumulis*. Mais ce qui frappe encore plus est le rapport entre ce passage d'Erichthon et le récit sédulien de la résurrection de Lazare, Jn. 11,1-44, dans *CP* 4,271-290:

⁵⁰ *Mét.* 11,80 *adspicit in teretes lignum succedere suras*.

⁵¹ *Mét.* 3,731.

⁵² *Mét.* 1,667 *partes speculatur in omnes*.

⁵³ Pour un aperçu de réminiscences ovidiennes dans le *CP* voir Mayr 73.

⁵⁴ Voir Duckworth 132-134, Springer 125.

⁵⁵ *Codex Montepessulanus* 362, voir Huemer dans les *Prolegomena* de son édition du *CP* (CSEL 10), p. XIII.

⁵⁶ Voir Mayr 72.

- Bethaniaeque solum repetens intrarat; ibique
 Lazarus occidua tumulatus sorte iacebat
 iam quarto sine luce die claususque sepulchri
 marmore corruptum tabo exalabat odorem.
 275 Flebant germanae, flebat populatio praesens,
 flebat et omnipotens, sed corpore, non deitate,
 exanimosque artus illa pro parte dolebat
 qua moriturus erat; lacrimis impleuit amicum
 maiestate deum. Quid credere, Martha, moraris?
 280 Quidue, Maria, gemis? Christum dubitatis an unum
 possit ab infernis hominem reuocare cauernis,
 qui dabit innumeras post funera surgere turbas?
 Ergo ubi clamantis domini sonuit tuba dicens:
 "Lazare, perge foras!", magno concussa pauore
 285 Tartara dissiliunt, Erebi patuere recessus,
 et tremuit letale chaos mortisque profundae
 lex perit atque anima proprias repente medullas
 cernitur ante oculos uiuens adstare cadauer.
 Postque sepulchralem tamquam recreatus honorem
 290 ipse sibi moriens et postumus extat et heres.

Evidemment pour notre poète le modèle littéraire était ici le passage du *Bellum Ciuile* de Lucain où on peut lire la résurrection d'un mort par Erichthon. A part la terminologie générale de caractère funèbre, on peut signaler une correspondance plus spécifique entre les deux passages. Il suffit de confronter les parties correspondantes:

Sédulius CP 4

Lucain *Bellum Ciuile* 6

277	<i>exanimosque artus</i>	721	<i>exanimés artus</i>
281	<i>infernis ... cauernis</i>	642	<i>Ditis caecis cauernis</i>
281	<i>reuocare</i>	633	<i>reuocasse</i>
		778	<i>reuocatus ab aggere ripae</i>
286-287	<i>mortis ... / lex perit</i>	635	<i>cessissent leges Erebi</i>
287	<i>anima ... repente medullas</i>	753	<i>et noua desuetis subrepens uita medullis</i>
288	<i>uiuens adstare cadauer</i>	727	<i>uiuio serpente cadauer</i>

En plus il y a des rapports avec d'autres passages du *Bellum Ciuile*. On reconnaît l'assonance du v. 285 *patuere recessus* avec Lucain 5,745 *patiere recessus* et celle du v. 286 *et tremuit letale chaos* avec Lucain 5,634 *extimuit natura chaos*. La phraséologie de l'oxymoron du v. 288 *adstare cadauer*, n'est-elle pas à comparer avec Lucain 4,787 *stetit omne cadauer*? Et, en effet, c'est la correspondance phraséologique et thématique du v. 287 avec Lucain

v. 753, qui rend plausible que la formulation *anima ... repente medullas*, “pendant que l’âme rampe par la moelle”, doit être maintenue contre la leçon proposée *repetente*, quoique l’emploi du verbe *repere* avec un accusatif ne soit pas attesté ailleurs.

Cependant, si intéressantes que soient ces preuves d’influence non-*virgilienne*, la plupart des réminiscences proviennent en effet de Virgile. C’est lui que le lecteur de Sédulius, élevé dans l’ambiance de la littérature païenne, a rencontré sans doute et reconnu avec plaisir en déguisement *sédulien*. Le *CP* doit avoir été accueilli comme un pendant rafraîchissant de l’*Enéide*. Notre poème aura joué dans l’éducation scolaire le rôle parfait d’une œuvre complémentaire sinon d’une substitution de l’épopée *virgilienne*. De ce point de vue on pourrait considérer notre poète comme un Virgile chrétien.⁵⁷ Ce n’était pas pour rien qu’Astériorius avait pris soin de l’édition de l’*Enéide* aussi bien que de celle du *CP*! Pourtant, l’autorité de Virgile restait incontestée pendant tout le Moyen Âge chrétien. Il suffit de relire Comparetti.

4. IMITATION PAR HASARD OU À DESSEIN?

Est-ce qu’on doit conclure qu’une imitation comme celle de Lucain dont je viens de parler, n’est que le résultat d’une action mécanique, un automatisme, ayant sa source dans un fonds inépuisable de réminiscences des auteurs classiques dans la mémoire du poète? Je ne le crois pas. A mon avis c’est de propos délibéré que Sédulius a emprunté à la littérature païenne un épisode horrible afin d’en reconstruire une résurrection chrétienne. L’action de la sorcière mène à la destruction du défunt, tandis que la résurrection de Lazare est un miracle vivifiant: par cette imitation contrastante l’atrocité païenne donne du relief à la douceur chrétienne. En même temps l’enchanteresse est privée du pouvoir sur la mort qui est attribué au Christ. C’est seulement Lui qui est le maître de la vie: voilà un bel exemple d’imitation contextuelle de caractère contrastant.

D’autre part il faut admettre que le poète a utilisé beaucoup de réminiscences seulement afin d’embellir le poème, en le revêtant

⁵⁷ Voir Huemer 1878, 50: “Sedulii carmina eo maior gloria secuta est, quo magis Vergilii vestigia institit. Hunc quasi alterum Vergilium per medium aevum habebant et admirabantur.” Dans plusieurs manuscrits médiévaux Virgile est suivi immédiatement par Sédulius. Springer 132 fait mention du *codex Laudunensis* 468 (IX^e s.) dans lequel figurent ensemble des renseignements auxiliaires pour la lecture de Virgile et de Sédulius.

d'un rayonnement épique, à moins que ce ne soit par hasard qu'il les a appliquées.⁵⁸ Mohrmann 1,155-157 fait remarquer que les poètes de l'épopée biblique étaient tellement dépendants de la tradition épique romaine qu'ils évitaient de la manière la plus rigoureuse l'usage de tous les éléments linguistiques d'un caractère spécifiquement chrétien, notamment des *termini technici* chrétiens, qui pourraient détruire l'illusion d'une poésie classique. A cause de cette tendance à un style poétique et traditionnel ils ont embrassé l'idiome de la poésie païenne. L'hexamètre chrétien, en général, n'admet pas que son coloris épique soit flétri par des termes techniques et spécifiquement chrétiens. C'est pour cela qu'on trouve des concepts chrétiens enveloppés dans la terminologie de l'épopée païenne.⁵⁹ Par une imitation comme *agmine uerso, uolucresque per auras* ou *res dura*, par une épithète comme *placidus* ou *pius* et par une hyperbole comme *uertice sidera tangit*, pour ne signaler que quelques éléments, l'épisode évangélique, écrit dans un idiome sans ornements, obtient une allure épique: ainsi les mots directs de Mt. 20,30 *secuta est eum turba multa* ont été remplacés dans CP 4,32 par l'expression virgilienne *comitante caterua*. De façon pareille dans CP 4,63 notre poète a embelli les mots chez Lc. 11,14 *locutus est*, concernant le muet qui commence à parler, par la phrase poétique *effudit lingua loquellas*, une réminiscence empruntée à l'*Enéide* 5,842 *funditque has ore loquellas*. Et de tels exemples sont nombreux.

Parfois le désir de revêtir le récit évangélique dans une forme plus maniérée, engendre une différence entre les deux narrations, de sorte que la locution poétique fait légèrement violence au sujet du récit évangélique. Un exemple: le figuier dont le dessèchement est raconté chez Mt. 21,17-19, est pourvu par Sédulius, dans CP 4,45, d'une dimension élevée et l'arbre est situé par lui en pleine campagne, *mediis adstans sublimis in aruis*: il est ici question de deux nouveaux éléments, qui manquent dans le récit de Matthieu. Or, la longueur énorme et la position isolée d'un arbre ne sont que des éléments conventionnels de la

⁵⁸ Ainsi pense Hudson-Williams 20: "The haphazard appearance of the borrowings suggests that echoes both of motifs and of language are the result of spontaneous and unconscious, or at least semiconscious reminiscence" et Mayr 69: "Es ist daran festzuhalten, daß Sedulius sich so in seinen Vergil hineingelesen hat, daß er oft *verba Vergilii* unbewußt verwendet".

⁵⁹ P.e. *nuntius* au lieu de *angelus*, *testis* au lieu de *martyr*, *uates* au lieu de *propheta*. On peut, cependant, constater que Sédulius n'est pas tellement strict, en admettant un relativement grand nombre de 'christianismes'.

description des arbres dans l'épopée: Ovide, Lucain, Stace et, bien entendu, Virgile nous en offrent maint spécimen.⁶⁰ Plus aberrante est la version sédulienne de la pêche miraculeuse de Lc. 5,1-7, racontée dans CP 4,109-124: selon notre poète, Simon Pierre obéit avec un cri d'allégresse, *Simon paret ouans*, à l'ordre du Seigneur de jeter les filets de nouveau, tandis qu'en vérité on lit chez Luc une réaction assez fatiguée de Pierre: "Maître, nous avons travaillé toute la nuit sans rien prendre". Il semble que Sédulius veut présenter, avec un motif didactique et exemplaire, le chef des apôtres comme un disciple obéissant malgré tout. En même temps, le lecteur est invité à croire que, partout où le Seigneur apparaît, tout son entourage est ravi de joie, une pensée sédulienne qu'on peut signaler aussi ailleurs dans le CP. Mais, n'oublions pas que la forme *ouans* figure souvent aussi dans la poésie épique dans le 2^e-3^e pied, précédée d'un nom.⁶¹ Et, en plus, chez Virgile on trouve deux fois la tournure *paremus ouantes*, exactement dans un contexte maritime où il s'agit, comme dans le passage chez Luc, d'une exhortation à s'embarquer de nouveau.⁶² Il est difficile de discerner quel critère a conduit notre auteur à choisir cette phrase virgilienne: soit un principe de caractère parénétique, afin de convaincre son lecteur de la justesse de la croyance en Jésus, soit un principe de caractère poétique, afin d'embellir son récit au moyen d'une locution épique. En tout cas, il faut signaler que beaucoup de traits stylistiques de l'épopée classique font partie de la technique épique de Sédulius: p.e la conclusion formulaire d'un discours par des phrases comme *nec plura locutus, et dictis iam finis erat, haec ubi dicta*, l'emploi d'un *talìa* ou *talibus* récapitulatif au début d'un vers, l'emploi fréquent du phénomène narratif d'une phraséologie de liaison *ergo ubi, ecce, interea*. Souvent il s'agit d'une unité métrique qui n'a été imitée qu'à cause de son assonance.⁶³

On trouve un bon exemple de la technique créative dans le domaine de l'imitation dans le passage mentionné ci-dessus de la pêche miraculeuse, CP 4,118-119: *Simon ... / linea claustra iacit*, "Simon jette les cages de lin (= les filets)". Le nom de Simon, mentionné chez Luc, peut avoir évoqué dans la mémoire de

⁶⁰ Voir Leeman 5-15. Pöschl 56 parle d'une "fast überirdische Größe".

⁶¹ Voir Schumann 4,94-97.

⁶² *Enéide* 3,189; 4,577.

⁶³ P.e. CP 4,8 *se iudice* = Virgile *Bucolique* 4,59 (au même endroit dans le vers, mais grammaticalement différent), CP 4,214 *uisumque recepit* = *Enéide* 10,899 *mentemque recepit* et de nombreux autres exemples.

Sédulius le nom du traître grec Sinon qui figure dans le deuxième livre de l'*Enéide*. Prenons ensuite le texte latin de Lc. 5,4 *laxate retia*, "jette les filets", en comparaison avec le passage de l'*Enéide* 2,259 où il s'agit de l'ouverture du cheval de Troie: *laxat claustra Sinon*: c'est le même verbe *laxare* qui signifie l'action de jeter les filets et d'ouvrir le cheval. Et on voit facilement, comment les *pineae claustra*, "la cage de pin" de Virgile, la désignation figurée du ventre du cheval, correspondent avec les *linea claustra*, "les cages de lin" en lesquelles notre poète a transformé métaphoriquement les *retia* de Luc. Belle réminiscence assonancée d'*Enéide* 2,258-259 *pineae ... / laxat claustra Sinon*.

Toutes ces réminiscences, de mots, d'hémistiches ou de vers entiers, sont-elles échappées par hasard à l'esprit de notre auteur, imprégné qu'il était de l'idiome de l'épopée classique, comme pense Hudson-Williams?⁶⁴ Sans doute il y a des emprunts mécaniques, des clichés appliqués par le poète inconsciemment ou pour des raisons cosmétiques. Mais d'autre part, voyons la tournure *triste ministerium* dans la scène de l'enterrement du jeune homme de Nain dans *CP* 4,130. C'est une imitation provenant littéralement de l'*Enéide* 6,223 où il est question des funérailles de Misène. Serait-ce un emprunt gratuit? J'encline plutôt à la supposition que le poète a voulu démontrer l'issue heureuse pour la pauvre mère et son fils, réalisée par un simple mot de Jésus, contrairement au deuil pompeux, mais inefficace de toute la cérémonie funèbre du héros païen Misène. Ainsi il y a beaucoup d'exemples convaincants d'une méthode d'imitation plus subtile, selon laquelle le poète, en détachant une réminiscence de son contexte païen et en l'appliquant à son nouvel entourage chrétien, crée délibérément un contraste entre les idées détestables du monde païen et la doctrine salutaire de la foi chrétienne.

5. ADAPTATION DES CONCEPTS PAÏENS À L'IDÉE CHRÉTIENNE

L'*imitatio ueterum* obtient dans l'épopée biblique une nouvelle dimension, puisqu'il s'agit d'une adoption chrétienne de tournures, d'images, de scènes et de concepts datant de l'ère préchrétienne. Le genre d'épopée biblique étant en dépendance de son prédécesseur païen, la nouvelle religion, dans son expression poétique, se voit confrontée entre autres, avec les données de la mythologie ancienne. A côté des espèces d'imitation qui sont, de

⁶⁴ Voir n. 58.

point de vue théologique, plus ou moins neutres, on rencontre des emprunts antithétiques, des transformations polémiques, des tournures préchrétiennes spiritualisées. Une des formes les plus simples d'imitation christianisée est celle de l'incorporation des noms et des concepts qui appartiennent à la mythologie païenne.⁶⁵ Des choses qui font partie du domaine chrétien reçoivent des épithètes classiques, comme *Tartara*, *Erebus*, *Elysium*, *Olympus*,⁶⁶ termes dont chaque poète épique chrétien était imprégné grâce à son éducation traditionnelle. On les trouve aussi chez Sédulius dans son récit de la résurrection de Lazare. C'est Prudence qui a introduit cette terminologie des enfers dans la poésie chrétienne. Il s'agit ici de clichés littéraires sans valeur de contraste. Les poètes chrétiens, cherchant à embellir leur poèmes, les utilisèrent sans se préoccuper du contenu original du concept païen.⁶⁷

La forme la plus audacieuse est celle de l'imitation contrastante.⁶⁸ Dans ce cas l'imitation n'est pas seulement le résultat involontaire de l'éducation littéraire du poète chrétien. Une locution classique est munie d'une connotation chrétienne, tandis qu'une correspondance est maintenue entre le contexte où l'imitation a été prise et celui où elle est placée. Comme nous avons vu, Thraede parle ici d'une confrontation voulue de la doctrine chrétienne avec le monde de l'épopée antique.⁶⁹ J'en donnerai quelques exemples ci-dessous.

6. 'KONTRASTIMITATION' CHEZ LES POÈTES CHRÉTIENS

a. usurpation des épithètes des dieux païens

L'adoption des termes épiques par un auteur chrétien, quelque innocente qu'elle puisse être, n'en obtient pas moins, en plusieurs cas, une tendance anti-païenne. Quand un poète chrétien at-

⁶⁵ Pour cette intégration d'éléments de la mythologie antique dans la poésie chrétienne voir Hagendahl 382-389, Comparetti 199-200, Hudson-Williams 14-16, Scheps 96.

⁶⁶ Voir Thraede 1035-1037, Hagendahl 388-389, Hudson-Williams 14, Van der Nat 1963, 19-23.

⁶⁷ Voir Hagendahl 382.

⁶⁸ Thraede 1034-1042 donne un système des types divers de la réception chrétienne, de l'imitation et de la transformation des locutions païennes. Une ligne de démarcation entre les types divers n'est pas toujours facile à tirer. Voir aussi Kartschoke 83-84.

⁶⁹ Voir n. 44; à tort Bardenhewer 4,644 caractérise l'emploi des tournures virgiliennes par Sédulius comme "ganz unbewußt".

tribue à Dieu ou à Jésus-Christ des épithètes et des titres avec lesquels sont invoqués les dieux du panthéon gréco-romain, il sort du cercle des clichés épiques. Il est question d'une chose plus sérieuse. En donnant une splendeur classique à la beauté de l'épopée chrétienne, l'adoption de qualifications comme *genitor rerum, conditor, tonans, omnipotens* et plusieurs autres, efface en même temps l'omnipotence de Jupiter. C'est une classe d'imitations qui va plus loin qu'une adoption peu originelle de la nomenclature mythologique du ciel et des enfers. Ce ne sont plus des lieux communs, mais des termes appliqués à dessein, imitation à base idéologique.⁷⁰ De manière appropriée, la tournure païenne est adaptée au concept chrétien afin que la pensée païenne soit supplantée par l'idée chrétienne. Au moyen d'un procédé aussi simple qu'ingénieux le Christ-Dieu est revêtu de la puissance que possédaient auparavant les dieux anciens. La pensée de la théologie païenne, produit de la culture païenne, est repoussée en faveur de la nouvelle religion à l'aide d'une adaptation créative de telle locution, prise dans la poésie païenne, produit elle aussi de la culture païenne.

b. le pouvoir divin attribué au Christ par imitation du contexte

Plus subtile est la méthode de l'imitation contrastante: le poète chrétien utilise une scène épique, où figure un dieu païen, pour en faire une scène dans laquelle le Christ manifeste sa puissance, conférant ainsi la puissance des dieux anciens au Seigneur. Puisque le lecteur chrétien connaît le contexte original, il voit immédiatement la puissance d'une divinité païenne transférée à son propre Dieu. C'est encore Prudence qu'on nomme l'initiateur de ce type de réception.⁷¹ Notre poète aussi s'applique avec ardeur, par la méthode de l'imitation du contexte, de faire ombrage à la pensée que contient le passage païen, en faveur de la suprême vérité chrétienne sur la toute-puissance divine. C'est pour cela que les dix lépreux de Lc. 17,13 s'exclament dans CP 4,194: *Praeceptor, miserere, potes namque omnia, Iesu*, "Maître Jésus, aie pitié, car tu es tout-puissant." On reconnaîtra sans doute *Enéide* 6,117

⁷⁰ A tort Hagendahl 388-389 est d'opinion que les auteurs chrétiens ne choisirent ces épithètes que pour des motifs esthétiques, manque d'une expression chrétienne équivalente, livrés qu'ils étaient à "the sublimity of thought and the beauty of the form" de l'épopée classique.

⁷¹ Voir Thraede 1040-1041, Hagendahl 384, Van der Nat 1973, 253-254. L'exemple le plus connu dans Prudence est *Psych. 1 Christe, graues hominum semper miserate labores*, imité d'*Enéide* 6,56 *Phoebe, graues Troiae semper miserate labores*.

alma, precor, miserere, potes namque omnia, les mots avec lesquels Enée s'adresse à la Sibylle d'Apollon. Ainsi la puissance d'Apollon est attribuée au Christ, Apollon qui est, du reste, fréquemment le but d'attaques littéraires chez d'autres poètes chrétiens aussi, entre autres chez Prudence, *Psychomachie*, v. 1, que je viens de citer.⁷² Le Christ est tout-puissant: pour propager ce message notre poète a utilisé un passage virgilien dans lequel la puissance du dieu païen est mentionnée, en le transformant dans un sens chrétien: Apollon est supplanté par Dieu. De la même manière, dans le récit sédulien du Christ calmant la tempête sur le lac,⁷³ la puissance de Neptune est annihilée par l'imitation contextuelle du passage virgilien *Enéide* 1,81-123: c'est le Christ qui domine vraiment les éléments.⁷⁴ Jupiter aussi est écarté: quand notre poète glorifie le Christ avec les mots *genitor rerum qui mundum lege coerces / et nulla sub lege manet*,⁷⁵ "le créateur qui régit l'univers par sa loi, sans être soumis à aucune loi lui-même", il change Lucain 2,7-10, qui dit de Jupiter, le *parens rerum*, qu'il est soumis aux lois de la création avec lesquelles il domine l'univers, *qua cuncta coerces / quoque lege tenens*. Sédulius crée ainsi une opposition entre le Christ qui ne dépend d'aucune loi et Jupiter soumis aux lois de l'univers, c'est-à-dire entre la vraie puissance souveraine de Dieu et la puissance limitée de Jupiter. Le royaume des morts est aussi le domaine du Christ: dans l'épisode de la résurrection de Lazare, on trouve des éléments tirés des vers de Virgile et de Lucain qui peignent l'horreur de l'enfer forcé d'admettre la lumière du jour, une pensée connue dans l'épopée païenne. Or, dans la présentation de Sédulius aussi le monde souterrain tremble de peur quand la voix du Christ est entendue: *magno concussa pauore / Tartara dissiliunt, Erebi patuere recessus / et tremuit letale chaos*.⁷⁶ En général le poète veut dire que Jésus-Christ est le seul roi de l'univers:

⁷² On y pourrait ajouter une belle preuve de l'identification d'Apollon avec Jésus-Christ dans un chant qui nous a été transmis comme Appendix sur Paulin de Nole *Carmen* 2,51-52 (CSEL 30,349): *O, Apollo uere, Paeon inclite / pulsor draconis inferi*: c'est le Christ qui, en vrai Apollon, chasse le serpent infernal.

⁷³ CP 3,46-69.

⁷⁴ Voir Springer 80. Déjà Prudence *Apoth.* 658-663 utilise cette scène virgilienne quand il fait mention de la tempête apaisée: il appelle le Christ *nimborum dominum tempestatumque potentem* (*Enéide* 1,80, concernant Eole, le roi des vents).

⁷⁵ CP 4,13-14.

⁷⁶ CP 4,284-286. Pour l'angoisse épique du monde souterrain voir *Enéide* 8,241-246 (scène de Cacus), 8,296 (Hercule visite les enfers), Lucain 6,742-744 (Erichthon menace les puissances infernales). Il y a aussi des correspondances textuelles avec *Enéide* 7,515, Lucain 5,634 et 745. Par ces imitations le Christ est représenté implicitement comme plus fort qu'Hercule et Allecto.

undis habitat, per tartara regnat / et caeli de nube tonat,⁷⁷ il possède la puissance de Neptune, Pluton, Jupiter et tous les autres dieux païens, qui sont dépourvus de cette puissance ou, option attrayante, qui ont été transformés en diables.

c. les dieux païens métamorphosés en diables

Un autre aspect de l'adaptation des pensées païennes est la métamorphose des dieux anciens en démons tels qu'on les rencontre dans le Nouveau Testament.⁷⁸ Par cette 'démonification' ces dieux du panthéon gréco-romain sont relégués à l'enfer chrétien, soumis à la puissance du Christ. Prudence⁷⁹ donne aux esprits malins de Mc. 5,1-13 franchement les noms d'Apollon, de Mercure et de Jupiter. Mais plus raffinée est la méthode de transformation selon laquelle le poète chrétien emprunte des passages épiques où figure une divinité païenne pour rédiger des passages bibliques où il s'agit de démons malins. Analysons le récit séduisant de la tentation du Christ par le diable.⁸⁰ Satan transporte Jésus sur une montagne et lui montre tous les royaumes du monde, en disant, chez Mt. 4,9: *haec omnia tibi dabo si procidens adoraueris me*,⁸¹ "Je te donnerai toutes ces choses, si tu te prosternes et m'adores". La version de notre poète est, CP 2,188-189, "*haec omnia*" *dicens / "me tribuente feres, si me prostratus"*⁸² *adores*". Ces mots rappellent les mots d'Apollon à son fils Phaéton, dans un passage d'Ovide:⁸³ *quoduis pete munus, ut illud / me tribuente feras*. Il y a donc un rapport évident, non seulement thématique, mais aussi phraséologique, entre ce que promet Apollon dans le passage ovidien et ce que promet le diable dans les vers séduliens, c'est-à-dire une affinité est établie entre Apollon et le diable. Notre poète, nous sans adresse, donne au diable la figure d'Apollon, mieux encore, Apollon devient un diable,⁸⁴ à l'aide d'une réminiscence littéraire, prise dans un texte païen où ce dieu joue un rôle si éminent. Dans des réminiscences pareilles pas exclusivement esthétiques, on voit de nouveau une relation entre les contextes des deux poèmes. D'une façon créative notre poète transforme une

⁷⁷ CP 5,311-312.

⁷⁸ Voir Dölger 153-176, Bartelink 12-24.

⁷⁹ *Apoth.* 400-420, voir Ac. 14,12.

⁸⁰ CP 2,175-219 = Mt. 4,1-11.

⁸¹ Je suis la version de la *Itala*, selon l'édition de Jülicher.

⁸² Dans ms. k de l'*Afra* on trouve aussi Mt. 4,9 *prostratus*.

⁸³ *Mét.* 2,44-45.

⁸⁴ Voir Hagendahl 384.

pièce de matériel classique et le met, dans un contexte comparable, au service de l'idéologie chrétienne. Encore plus intéressante est ensuite la manière créative dont notre poète traite l'épisode de Mc. 1,21-28, où Jésus guérit un démoniaque dans la synagogue de Capharnaüm. Ayant reçu l'ordre de sortir, le diable sort du possédé, ce qui est raconté par Sédulius dans *CP* 4,87-89 ainsi:

nec plura locutus
imperio terrente tacet hominemque reliquit
pulsus et in uacuas fugiens euauit auras.

Sans dire plus rien il se tut, alarmé par le commandement, et ayant été expulsé il quitta l'homme, et s'enfuyant il disparut dans l'air vide.

Dans ces trois vers on reconnaît immédiatement le passage chez Virgile, où Mercure, après avoir exhorté Enée, s'éclipse brusquement dans l'air, *Enéide* 4,276-278:

tali Cyllenius ore locutus
mortales uisus medio sermone reliquit
et procul in tenuem ex oculis euauit auram.

Trois vers successifs se terminent presque identiquement chez Sédulius et chez Virgile. De plus il faut signaler la correspondance métrique, aussi bien que le fait important que, comme Mercure quitte Enée *medio sermone*, ainsi le diable se tait tout à coup et s'évanouit sans dire plus rien. Cette disparition soudaine du diable, correspondant avec celle de Mercure et marquée par la césure forte après *tacet* dans v. 88, est une chose surprenante, vu le fait que selon le récit évangélique le diable continue de crier, Mc. 1,26 *clamans uoce magna discessit ab eo*. Par un tour ingénieux notre poète a changé Mercure, le messager de Jupiter, figurant dans une scène virgilienne très connue, en un esprit malin du Nouveau Testament, à moins qu'on ne veuille immoler plutôt Apollon sur l'autel de cette 'Kontrastimitation': il y a une autre scène de l'*Enéide*, qui ressemble thématiquement et phraséologiquement à celle que je viens de discuter, un passage où Apollon ayant visité Ascagne s'éclipse aussi promptement que Mercure: il s'agit d'*Enéide* 9,656-658:

sic orsus Apollo
mortales medio adspectus sermone reliquit
et procul in tenuem ex oculis euauit auram.

En effet, Mercure et Apollon sont des dieux qui à maintes reprises sont transformés en diables dans la littérature chrétienne.

P.e. Prudence *Apoth.* 393-413 fait le Christ triompher de trois démons, dont deux portent le nom d'Apollon et de Cyllène (= Mercure) et le troisième est nommé Jupiter. Chez Sulpice Sévère on rencontre saint Martin s'en prenant par sa prière à deux hommes possédés qui confessent leur identité, *ille se Iouem, iste Mercurium fatebantur*.⁸⁵ Parmi beaucoup d'autres Tatien, Origène et Lactance connaissent Apollon comme un esprit malin. Les exemples que je viens de donner supportent l'opinion de Fontaine:⁸⁶ "Ainsi les dieux des enfers classiques viennent-ils, à travers Virgile, modeler le visage que va prendre Satan dans le Moyen Age occidental." Donc, cette espèce d'imitation créative de Sédulius répond exactement à une tradition de 'démonification', la même tradition qui a métamorphosé la *Magna Mater Deum* païenne en la 'grand-mère du diable' dans la locution proverbiale chrétienne.⁸⁷

Un autre exemple du procès démonisant se trouve dans le rapport sédulien du Christ qui chasse sept diables de Marie-Madeleine, rapport auquel se réfère Lc. 8,2. Les vers dont il s'agit sont, dans CP 4,145.147-149:

sed squameus anguis
uolucresque per auras
in chaos infernae lapsus penetrale gehennae
septem ingens gyros, septena uolumina traxit.

Mais le serpent écailleux, glissant par les airs volants dans le chaos profond de la géhenne infernale, tout énorme qu'il était, fit sept tournolements, sept tortillements.

Ces vers sont une imitation d'*Enéide* 5,84-88

dixerat haec adytis cum lubricus anguis ab imis
septem ingens gyros, septena uolumina traxit,
amplexus placide tumulum lapsusque per aras,
caeruleae cui terga notae, maculosus et auro
squamam incendebat fulgor.

Chez Virgile il est question du serpent, une apparition de nature divine, qui, à l'anniversaire de la mort d'Anchise, glisse triomphalement sur l'autel: cet animal divin a été transformé par Sédulius en sept diables, qui sont chassés vers les enfers par Jésus-Christ. La correspondance en diction et en phraséologie des

⁸⁵ *Dial.* 3,6,4. Voir aussi *Vita Martini* 22,1 *nam interdum [diabolus] in Iouis personam, plerumque Mercuri ... se ... transfiguratum uultibus offerebat [Martino]*. Compare *Ac.* 14,11.

⁸⁶ Dans son commentaire sur Sulpice Sévère, *Vie de Saint Martin*, SC 135, 964, n. 1.

⁸⁷ Voir Dölger 153-176.

deux scènes est remarquable: à signaler sont l'emploi de *anguis*, *lapsus*, *squameus* (*squamam* chez Virgile), l'assonance de *per auras* avec *per aras* et l'emprunt d'un vers entier.⁸⁸ Sans doute tous ces éléments servent à contraster les comportements des deux serpents respectifs. Chez Virgile le reptile vient *adytis ab imis*, de l'intérieur du tumulus d'Anchise, représenté comme un sanctuaire, auquel enfin il retourne sans être blessé. Enée, épouvanté par l'apparition extraordinaire, renouvelle avec ses compagnons les sacrifices, puisqu'il soupçonne que le serpent est un être divin. Au contraire, dans le passage sédulien c'est le serpent qui est battu et qui s'enfuit dans son sanctuaire, le *chaos penetrale* de l'enfer, tandis que Marie-Madeleine reste sur place, délivrée de son fureur, le serpent diabolique et tortueux étant éliminé. La tortuosité du serpent virgilien, qui sert à démontrer la puissance d'un reptile à demi sacré, est transformée par Sédulius en les mouvements d'un diable impie et fallacieux, qui est frappé et chassé avec toutes ses fourberies.

d. imitation contrastante de caractère didactique et parénétiq

Ce n'est pas exclusivement le domaine de la puissance divine qui est l'objet des emprunts contrastants. Souvent Sédulius adopte une tournure de l'épopée païenne ou la transforme en une scène chrétienne afin de condamner la pensée païenne en la mettant en face des bénédictions de la foi chrétienne. Le lecteur érudit, qui reconnaît le contexte de l'original, voit par comparaison comment la nouvelle religion triomphe de l'ancienne foi. Dans ces cas la technique d'imitation sert à des intentions didactiques et parénétiq. Dans cette catégorie on pourrait ranger la scène de la tempête apaisée, Mt. 8,23-27, comme elle est traitée par Sédulius:⁸⁹ par le renvoi implicite à Enée, le prince héroïque, qui n'est plus maître de la situation, le lecteur voit plus clairement que Dieu est le vrai pilote auquel on se confie toujours avec succès.

Notre poète nous offre une transformation bien réussie de matériel virgilien dans CP 4,233-250, où il présente l'épisode de la femme adultère, raconté chez Jn. 8,1-11. D'une manière convaincante il donne, au moyen de 'Kontrastimitation', une leçon édifiante, qui nous montre comment quelques femmes de sang royal sont abaissées et abandonnées par leurs dieux païens,

⁸⁸ En plus la scène virgilienne retourne dans la diction de l'*Opus Paschale* 4,13 (263,21 Huemer) *squamei serpens maculosus*.

⁸⁹ Voir plus haut, 142-143.

tandis qu'une femme malheureuse se trouve sauvée et exaltée par Jésus-Christ. Voici le texte de CP 4,233-239:

Dumque sui media residens testudine templi
ore tonans patrio directi ad peruia callis
errantem populum monitis conuertit amicis,
ecce trahebatur magna stipante caterua
turpis adulterii mulier lapidanda reatu,
quam Pharisaea manus placido sub iudice sistens
cum damnare parat, plus liberat.

Pendant que le Seigneur était assis sous la voûte au milieu de son temple, s'adressant, à voix paternelle, au peuple errant pour qu'il le remît dans la bonne voie avec des avertissements amicaux: voilà qu'une femme, incriminée d'un adultère hideux, était traînée, entourée d'une grande foule, afin d'être lapidée. Mais la troupe des Pharisiens, dans son effort de la condamner, la relâcha plutôt en la mettant devant le juge aimable.

La pauvre pécheresse est traînée devant Jésus qui se trouve dans le temple: cette action est décrite par la tournure *ecce trahebatur*, laquelle nous conduit directement à *Enéide* 2,403, où la *Priameia uirgo* Cassandre est traînée hors du temple: là elle ira à l'encontre de sa ruine. En même temps Sédulius applique aux Pharisiens rassemblés les mots épiques *magna stipante caterua*, qui dans l'*Enéide* 1,497 et 4,136 indiquent le cercle qui accompagne la reine Didon. Dans l'imagination poétique de Sédulius, Jésus est assis au milieu du temple, *media testudine templi*, à l'instar de Didon dans le temple de Carthage.⁹⁰ Et de nouveau c'est la reine de Carthage qui apparaît par la phrase *ore tonans*, si on se rappelle la scène où elle, dans son désespoir, invoque les dieux, *ter centum tonat ore deos*,⁹¹ pendant les opérations magiques qui précèdent son suicide. Par ces réminiscences Sédulius rappelle au lecteur l'infortune des deux femmes royales de l'épopée païenne, dont la chute retentissante est connue. Ces deux femmes ne furent pas aidées par les dieux auxquels elles s'étaient dédiées, Cassandre étant même tirée violemment hors du temple de Minerve, ses yeux ardents dirigés en vain vers le ciel. De la même manière les dieux de Didon l'abandonnèrent dans son angoisse. Au contraire c'est à une femme anonyme et inconnue que le Christ procure le salut, une femme sans nom qui ne possède pas d'ancêtres comme Didon ou comme Cassandre. Le message du poète s'impose ici aussi: débarrassez-vous de toute pompe vaine du monde païen et

⁹⁰ *Enéide* 1,505.

⁹¹ *Enéide* 4,510.

suivez le Christ. L'humble simplicité chrétienne est plus salutaire que la dignité royale mais périssable des héros païens.

A la reine Didon revient l'honneur douteux d'être exposée de préférence, par la voie d'imitation contrastante, comme exemple détestable de grandeur païenne. Elle est p.e. la victime de Sédulius dans une invective contre le cruel Hérode à cause du massacre des innocents. Quelques vers de l'*Enéide*, où Didon est le principal personnage, sont copiés presque littéralement. Ils ont subi un changement subtil de sorte qu'on voit que la fureur insensée du roi juif est mise en pendant au désespoir déliré de la reine carthaginoise.

Voici le texte de CP 2,127-130:

quis tibi tunc, lanio, cernenti talia sensus
quosue dabas fremitus, cum uulnera feruere late
prospiceres arce ex summa uastumque uideres
misceri ante oculos tantis plangoribus aequor?

Qu'est-ce que tu sentais, boucher, au moment où tu voyais cela, quels rugissements poussais-tu, quand tu voyais, du sommet de ton palais, fourmiller les plaies de tous les côtés, en t'apercevant que devant tes propres yeux la vaste plaine se remplissait de telles plaintes?

Ces vers sont à comparer avec *Enéide* 4,408-411:

quis tibi tum, Dido, cernenti talia sensus
quosue dabas gemitus, cum litora feruere late
prospiceres arce ex summa totumque uideres
misceri ante oculos tantis clamoribus aequor?

Notre poète n'a fait que changer légèrement quelques éléments de ce passage virgilien, dans lequel il est question de Didon en détresse voyant le départ imprévu de son amant Enée, qui s'efforce, avec ses compagnons, à préparer la flotte. Il s'agit d'un passage des sentiments: la rage tourmentée de Didon est devenue la cruauté enragée d'Hérode, le désespoir humain de l'une est changé en l'insensibilité bestiale de l'autre. Mais en premier lieu cette réminiscence non ambigüe—même la figure de l'apostrophe a été retenue—implique la conviction de notre poète que Didon est une reine de rang élevé qu'il faut mépriser, comme la culture non-chrétienne qu'elle représente. Elle ne mérite que d'être métamorphosée de façon littéraire en le tyran Hérode: ils sont tous les deux ennemis du vrai chrétien.⁹²

⁹² Scheps 152 qui discute le parallélisme des deux passages, parle d'une 'réminiscence arrangée'. Bien qu'il signale la différence entre les pensées des deux poètes, il ne conclut pas à une opposition réfléchie de Sédulius de caractère didactique.

Voyons ensuite un des plus beaux exemples de 'Kontrastimitation', dont Didon—cela ne nous surprendra guère—est de nouveau le personnage principal: le récit de l'entrée glorieuse du Christ à Jérusalem, racontée par tous les évangélistes,⁹³ ce qui est la scène finale du quatrième livre du *CP*, les vers 291-308. Voyons *CP* 4,291-298:

Vtque caduca uagi contemnens culmina saeculi
monstraret se rite deum, non curribus altis
qui pompae mortalis honor, rapidisque quadrigis
puluereum sulcauit iter nec terga frementis
ardua pressit equi, faleris qui pictus et ostro
ora cruentatum mandentia concutit aurum
sed lento potius gestamine uilis aselli
rectori suffecit honos.

Afin de montrer dûment qu'il est Dieu, en méprisant la grandeur caduque du monde instable, le Seigneur ne se sillonna pas une voie dans la poussière de la rue ni avec un char superbe, honneur d'une pompe mortelle, ni avec un quadriges rapide. Il ne pressa pas le dos élevé d'un cheval hennissant, orné de phalères et de pourpre, qui agite la bouche, pendant qu'elle mâche l'or sanglant de sa bride, mais c'était plutôt l'honneur d'un âne simple, d'une bête de somme lente, qui suffit au recteur.

L'humilité du Christ triomphant est énoncée par le contraste entre l'âne modeste sur lequel le Seigneur fait son entrée à Jérusalem et certains chevaux de luxe épiques, qui sont cachés dans les réminiscences au moyen desquelles Sédulius a construit son récit. Il s'agit du cheval paré de pourpre et d'or, mâchant son frein, avec lequel Didon ira à la chasse, *Enéide* 4,134-135:

ostroque insignis et auro
stat sonipes ac frena ferox spumantia mandit

en combinaison avec un autre cheval de parade monté par le roi Minos dans Ovide *Mét.* 8,33-34:

purpureusque albi stratis insignia pictis
terga premebat equi spumantiaque ora regebat.

Le poitrail splendide, le caparaçon de pourpre, le frein d'or, font partie aussi du harnais des chevaux du roi Latinus, *Enéide* 7,277-279:

⁹³ Mt. 21,1-11; Mc. 11,1-10; Lc. 19,29-38; Jn. 12,12-19. Sédulius suit en général le récit de Jean.

instratos ostro alipedes pictisque tapetis;
 aurea pectoribus demissa monilia pendent;
 tecti auro fuluum mandunt sub dentibus aurum.⁹⁴

Dans la présentation de notre poète tous ces insignes d'une dignité royale sont ôtés à l'animal sur lequel les évangélistes font entrer le Christ triomphateur dans Jérusalem et ce n'est pas sans raison préméditée que Sédulius emploie presque littéralement⁹⁵ des phrases facilement reconnaissables de l'épopée classique. C'est le lustre éphémère de la reine carthaginoise et d'autres personnes royales épiques, et en général du monde fallacieux des païens, représenté par l'épopée, qui est rejeté par notre poète, qui lui oppose la simplicité naturelle du Christ, laquelle est la marque de sa vraie royauté éternelle et immortelle. Mais il ne s'agit pas seulement de l'apparat altier des figures épiques ou mythologiques contre lequel Sédulius s'insurge au moyen de ses imitations poétiques. Sa présentation de la scène de l'entrée dans Jérusalem contient aussi beaucoup d'éléments qui rappellent des cortèges triomphants contemporains: le *triumphus* et l'*aduentus* d'un *princeps* séculier, d'un consul ou d'un empereur. Le grand char, le quadriges, le cheval au poitrail de pourpre et d'or, ce sont des éléments magnifiques qui font partie, en réalité, de la *pompa circensis*, du *processus consularis*, de la *pompa triumphalis* et de l'*aduentus* impérial.⁹⁶ Notamment l'idée d'*aduentus* s'impose, puisqu'il est question à Jérusalem aussi d'un *aduentus*, l'entrée solennelle du Christ, préfiguration eschatologique du *secundus aduentus*, son second avènement. Ainsi Sédulius condamne non seulement, par ses imitations épiques, le luxe fallacieux de personnages littéraires, imaginés ou mi-historiques, comme Didon et Minos, mais il anéantit aussi, par des références aux institutions impériales de son propre temps, aux cortèges qu'il a pu observer lui-même à Rome, la dignité illusoire des hommes munis d'une puissance terrestre. Il lui oppose le vrai triomphe

⁹⁴ Voir aussi Ovide *Mét.* 6,222-223 *Tyrioque rubentia suco / terga premunt auroque graues moderantur habenas*, sc. les fils de Niobé.

⁹⁵ Chez Sédulius il manque ici le cheval écumant que présentent Virgile et Ovide dans les passages en question, mais on le retrouve dans la version révisée de l'*Opus Paschale* 272,3-4: *spumosum cruenti pondus auri mandentia*. La tournure de substitution *ora cruentatum*, au début de v. 296 est formulaire, voir p.e. Ovide *Mét.* 4,104 (*ore cruentato*), Stace *Théb.* 4,365 (*ora cruentata*).

⁹⁶ Pour les formes diverses de la *pompa* impériale et les éléments qui y appartiennent voir Alföldi 94-96, 167-186, Versnel 59, 302 et l'index s.v. *quadriga*. Pour l'*aduentus* voir MacCormack 15-89. Voir aussi mon commentaire sur *CP* 4, p. 192-195.

du Christ, *qui regit aetherium princeps in principe regnum*.⁹⁷

Un dernier beau spécimen d'une imitation de caractère spirituel conclura ces considérations sur l'emploi créatif des réminiscences classiques de notre poète. C'est l'épisode de la pécheresse pénitente de Lc. 7,36-50. Elle arrose de ses larmes—des larmes de pénitence, selon Sédulius—les pieds du Seigneur, sur lesquels elle répand le parfum, après les avoir essuyés avec ses cheveux: enfin les péchés lui sont pardonnés. Sédulius y attache la conclusion didactique suivante, dans CP 4,76-81:

Magna est medicina fateri
quod nocet abscondi, quoniam sua uulnera nutrit
qui tegit et plagam trepidat nudare medenti.
En polluta diu, modicum purgata recessit
per gemitum propriique lauans in gurgite fletus
munda suis lacrimis redit et detera capillis.

Comme il est salutaire d'avouer des choses qui nuisent si on les dissimule, parce qu'on nourrit ses blessures, si on les cache en hésitant à dénuder la plaie devant le médecin. Et voilà que la femme, impure depuis longtemps, s'en alla, purifiée par peu de gémissements; et se lavant dans l'eau de ses propres pleurs, elle retourna chez elle, nettoyée par ses larmes et essuyée par ses cheveux.

Ainsi la christianisation d'un passage virgilien connu, du troisième livre des *Géorgiques*, où il est question du traitement des brebis. Il faut, dit Virgile, que le berger traite ses brebis galeuses sans délai, de peur que les plaies ne continuent de s'ulcérer tant qu'elles sont dissimulées. On comparera le texte des *Géorgiques* 3,454-456:

alitur uitium uiuitque tegendo
dum medicas adhibere manus ad uulnera pastor
abnegat.

On nourrit le mal qui vit tant qu'on le cache, pendant que le berger refuse d'appliquer les mains guérissantes aux blessures.

Il y a une correspondance manifeste dans le choix des mots: *alitur uitium* (Virgile) à côté de *uulnera nutrit* (S.), *tegendo* (Virg.) à côté de *tegit* (S.), *medicas manus* (Virg.) à côté de *medenti* (S.), *uulnera* (Virg.) à côté de *plagam* (S.). En plus on reconnaîtra le rapport thématique entre les deux scènes—un rapport métaphorique—, qui concerne l'issue funeste d'un mal caché:⁹⁸ il faut promptement consulter le médecin. En même temps on voit ici

⁹⁷ CP 4,307.

⁹⁸ Pour ce qui concerne la pensée, voir Lucrèce 4,1066 *ulcus enim uiuescit et inueterascit alundo*, Virgile *Enéide* 4,2 *uulnus alit uenis*.

une pensée stoïcienne, exprimée p.e. par Sénèque dans *Epistula* 53,8 *uitia sua confiteri sanitatis indicium est*, *Epistula* 56,10 *omnia enim uitia in aperto leniora sunt; morbi quoque tunc ad sanitatem inclinant cum ex abdito erumpunt*. On comparera la métaphore médicale du philosophe païen avec celle de notre poète! Il s'agit d'une sotériologie pareille: chacun qui veut s'améliorer, doit montrer ses maux au 'Seelenleiter'.⁹⁹ Le Christ est le divin 'Seelenleiter', à qui on doit montrer les blessures de son âme. Si on lit le passage entier des *Géorgiques* 3,440-463, on voit que la médecine recommandée est de plonger le mouton dans l'eau, *udisque aries in gurgite uillis / mersatur*,¹⁰⁰ ce qui est à comparer avec l'immersion dans les larmes de notre v. 80 *lauans in gurgite fletus*. Ainsi les deux immersions sont également salutaires: la brebis est guérie de sa gale dans l'eau d'un fleuve, la pécheresse de ses plaies spirituelles dans l'eau de ses larmes, qui sont des larmes de regret: elle est baptisée dans ces larmes, qui sont devenues pour elle semblables au *baptismus paenitentiae in remissionem peccatorum*, le baptême de pénitence, comme Jean-Baptiste l'avait prêché.¹⁰¹ La mise-en-scène sédulienne de la femme purifiée de ses péchés par ses larmes pourrait être conçue aussi comme une préfiguration du baptême chrétien.¹⁰²

L'incorporation de cette réminiscence des *Géorgiques* dans le récit de la pécheresse pénitente, ajoute implicitement à la représentation du Christ comme médecin qui se soucie des âmes des pécheurs, l'image du Bon Pasteur, qui veille, comme le *pastor* chez Virgile, sur ses brebis malades. Il est le Bon Pasteur qui garde le troupeau de ses fidèles.¹⁰³ De même que Virgile montre la façon dont la brebis malade peut guérir, de même Sédulius enseigne comment la pécheresse recouvrira sa santé, c'est-à-dire comment tout pécheur guérira par les soins du Seigneur, le Bon Pasteur et le médecin. Chez lui les brebis malades (les pécheurs)

⁹⁹ Voir Hadot 164.

¹⁰⁰ *Géorg.* 3,446-447.

¹⁰¹ Mc. 1,4; Ac. 13,24.

¹⁰² Les cheveux, v. 69 *crine*, v. 81 *capillis* dans le récit sédulien jouent en effet un rôle important dans le rite du baptême de l'église ancienne: voir Van Unnik 77-100. Peut-être Sédulius a vu un rapport avec la peau du mouton malade dans la scène virgilienne, *Géorg.* 3,446 *udis uillis*.

¹⁰³ Concernant la position centrale de l'image du Christ comme le Bon Pasteur dans le *CP* voir Springer 100-105 et *CP* 1,82-84. C'est aussi le passage des *Géorgiques* sur lequel Prudence *Cathemerinon* 8,33-40 se base dans son application allégorique de la parabole du pasteur et de la brebis égarée (Lc. 15,3-5), qu'il amplifie des éléments virgiliens, que la brebis est malade, que sa peau est déchirée par le buisson épineux et que le berger la nettoie: voir Schwen 52-53.

retrouvent leur salut, à condition qu'ils se rendent auprès de lui afin de lui montrer leurs blessures (les péchés). De façon inventive Sédulius entrelace des éléments de la scène virgilienne—les brebis galeuses, l'exhortation à montrer la maladie au médecin, le traitement, la guérison dans l'eau—et les thèmes chrétiens des péchés, de la pénitence et du baptême.

7. CONCLUSION

Imitatio ueterum, l'imitation des mots ou des phrases de la littérature pré-chrétienne, peut avoir été pratiquée par notre poète en partie sans qu'il s'en est consciemment rendu compte. En même temps il faut constater qu'il y a aussi beaucoup d'exemples d'imitation délibérée. Il est impossible de séparer exactement les types divers de réception. Le désir de pourvoir le poème chrétien d'un coloris épique va souvent de pair avec l'effort de christianiser une tournure ou même une scène entière de l'épopée païenne. Sédulius s'intéresse particulièrement à deux domaines: il s'applique à ridiculiser la mythologie païenne soit en attribuant à Dieu la puissance des dieux classiques, soit en métamorphosant ces dieux en démons malins. D'autre part l'imitation est pratiquée dans la poursuite d'un but didactique, parénétique ou spirituel. Par le moyen de 'Kontrastimitation' le message chrétien, qui invite à quitter le chemin de la perdition et à suivre le chemin du salut, est opposé à la pensée païenne qui figure dans le passage imité. Souvent dans ce cas on peut signaler une relation entre le contexte du passage sédulien et celui du passage imité. Il faut, cependant, prendre garde qu'on ne voie pas dans toute imitation une transformation spirituelle ou un contraste profond de caractère théologique. Pourtant il faut également quitter le point de vue que l'imitation chrétienne des mots, des tournures, des scènes païennes ne s'élève pas au-dessus du motif d'un embellissement épique. La façon dont Sédulius pratique l'*imitatio ueterum* est parfois d'une originalité surprenante. C'est pour cela qu'on doit modifier l'opinion de Comparetti 199, qui dit que les idées et les formes de la poésie chrétiennes, à cause d'une incompatibilité fondamentale, ne se sentaient pas à l'aise dans les formules classiques. Sédulius a surmonté cette incompatibilité d'une manière souvent très créative. Donc, quand l'auteur d'une *uita Sedulii*, dans le *codex Vindobonensis* 85, se demande: *Quibus facultatibus Sedulius carmen scripsit?* et qu'il ne répond que: *Eorum quos imitatus*

est, on l'accusera à juste titre d'un jugement peu nuancé. L'activité de notre poète mérite une approche plus positive!¹⁰⁴

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¹⁰⁴ Je voudrais remercier Mme E. Kranendonk et M. A. Bastiaensen qui ont bien voulu relire le texte français de cet exposé.

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THE MERCHANT OF NISIBIS SAINT EPHREM AND HIS FAITHFUL QUEST FOR UNION IN NUMBERS

by

ANDREW PALMER

1 INTRODUCTION

“That ocean on which all the ships of poets sail.”

This paean from the greatest of Ephrem’s successors, Jacob of Serugh (*Ephrem* 665¹), whose life spanned the fifth and the sixth centuries, is only an exaggeration when applied beyond the Syriac-speaking world. Yet even there, Ephrem’s genius was the leaven in the dough of mediaeval Christian poetry. The hymnographic art which was the chief literary innovation of Byzantium was inspired by Syriac poetry and formed in the Greek-speaking communities of Syria. From Byzantium it radiated through eastern and western Europe and through the Arabic-speaking Churches of the Near East. Papal publications enabled the father of the Methodists to appreciate the “exhortations” of Ephrem, “the most awakening of all the Ancients” (J. Wesley), more directly. The recent proliferation of published studies and translations shows that Ephrem still retains his appeal, at least for one section of the human race, on the threshold of the twenty-first century.

The earliest surviving Syriac poetry is so mature that it would seem to stand near the end of a development which stretches much further back in time. Motifs and literary forms known from Sumerian and Akkadian poetry resurface in Syriac, hinting at the continuity of bardic culture in Mesopotamia. Inspiration alone cannot explain the technical accomplishment of Ephrem (d. 373), the greatest poet in the Syriac language. He brought to per-

¹ All abbreviations will be resolved at the end of this article.

fection, in a lifetime which filled the first three quarters of the fourth century A.D., a skill with language and with number inherited from a long line of practitioners. Whether because his genius eclipsed them, or because of the heavy odds against the transmission of ancient texts, the works of most of Ephrem's predecessors have been lost. We have the *Odes of Solomon* and the *Demonstrations of Aphrahat the Persian Sage*. We also have the *Hymn of the Pearl*, a ballad embedded in a novel about the Apostle Thomas, who is supposed to have sung it while imprisoned in an Indian gaol. The theme of this ballad is the quest of a prince who "knows his nature gone and longs to have it back". The challenge is to retrieve a pearl from the "hissing serpent" in Egypt. The reward is reinvestiture with the "splendid gown" made for him by his parents, the King and Queen of the East, in which he feels "no longer two, but one". He will then become, with his brother, the "Second" in the royal trinity. All this was grist to Ephrem's mill, as we shall see in due course. But first, let us here rehearse the ballad of Saint Thomas!

The Quest for the Pearl

- 1 A child I was, no more;
my father was the king;
rich as my parents were,
they gave me everything.
Then, suddenly, one day,
from our own land, the east,
they packed me on my way,
with treasures from their chest,
plenty, yet light, for one
to bear their weight alone.
- 2 Gold, on the Heights refined,
silver of Ganzak great,
chalcedony of Hind,
and Beth Cushman agate.
In adamantine arms,
that shatter steel, they locked
my limbs to parry harms,
and bade me be defrocked:
scarlet and white, the gown
which their love made was gone!
- 3 They pledged me to this tryst
and etched it on my heart:
"To Egypt go! Slip past
the hissing serpent's guard!
Bring back the pearl that lies
in Ocean, near his lair!
For this thine enterprise
thy bright gown shalt thou wear
and, like thy brother, be
our royal Deputy!"
- 4 I journeyed from the east
escorted by two guides.
Full dangerous the quest,
and I so young besides.
I traversed Mayshan's bound,
where eastern merchants meet,
and came to Babel's land,
and entered Sarbug's street.
To Egypt I came down
at last, henceforth alone.
- 5 Straight to the serpent's lair
to lie in wait I stole,
that, once it ceased to stir,
I might obtain that pearl.
I found a hostel near;
they looked at me askance.
But I, the foreigner,
so lonely, found by chance
an easterner like me,
handsome, anointed, free.
- 6 To me this boy adhered;
my partner he became.
My plot with him I shared,
because we were the same.
I put him on his guard
against that unclean race,
while I my limbs attired
in Egypt's clothes, in case,
suspecting, they should warn
the worm to watch its stone.
- 7 I know not how those men
unmasked my foreign blood;
or how, beguiled by them,
I shared their foreign food.
My parents I forgot,
and to their king I bowed,
oblivious of what
to my King I had vowed.
There in the lethal deep,
thus drugged, I fell asleep.
- 8 All this my parents knew
and grieved for my sad state.
The royal trumpets blew
a summons to our gate.
All Parthia's kings and lords
assembled from the east,
to warn me with wise words,
that I might not be lost.
See, they inscribe the same,
and each appends his name!

- 9 "All peace this letter brings
from thine own family:
thy sire, the King of Kings;
our royal Deputy,
thy brother; and the Queen
of Orient, thy dame;
to thee, in Egypt: son!
Awake! Get up! For shame,
remember who thou art,
and who enslaves thy heart!
- 10 Hear what we have to say:
Do not forget the pearl,
for which thou art away!
And thy bright robe recall,
that this may be thy gown
of office, when thy name,
in lists of high renown,
the heralds loud proclaim!
Then both our sons shall be
the Viceroy of our see!"
- 11 My letter by the King's
own seal was made secure,
and, with an eagle's wings,
flew to the serpent's lair.
Startled, as by the rush
of feathers at my ear,
I saw that word made flesh,
that bird made messenger,
and recognized the text
which on my heart was etched.
- 12 I knew my nature gone
and longed to have it back;
remembered, too, the stone
which I had come to take;
began to lull the worm,
that hissing serpent dire,
by calling on the name
of him who is my Sire;
on our Viceroy, his son;
and on our dame, the Queen.
- 13 I snatched the pearl and turned
to seek my Father's land.
Their filthy clothes I spurned,
stripped off and left behind.
[The young man from the inn,
with whom I shared my quest,
I never saw again
whilst I was in the west.]
Eastward the sky gleamed
bright:
I focussed on that light.
- 14 There my awakener
I sighted on the road;
that flying messenger
my new direction showed.
And just as, when I slept,
she woke me with her word,
so out of dark Egypt
her light my footsteps led.
Like royal silk, her sheen
in front of me did gleam.
- 15 As beacon and as word,
by love's attraction strong,
my messenger and guide,
the letter, spurred me on.
I passed through Sarbug's
street,
kept Babel on my left,
arrived at Mayshan great,
which harbours trading craft,
that city on the coast,
of which all merchants boast.
- 16 And there I met my gown,
my childhood's raiment bright,
sent by my parents down
from noble Hurkan's height,
entrusted to the care
of treasurers, like gold.
That robe's design, once dear,
no longer I recalled.
Facing it now, I see
the mirrored form of me!

- 17 Its whole I do perceive
in all of me; my whole
with this my gown receive.
No longer two I feel,
but one with it in form.
Those treasurers, also,
who brought it to me, seem
identical, though two.
One emblem of one Lord
on both their forms is scored.
- 18 The garment which they bring,
adorned with many hues,
was pledged me by my King
and worked with gold and
jewels:
agate of Beth Cushan
and beryls bright and clear,
chalcedony and brown
sardonyx, stones so dear;
adamant all along
its joints has made it strong.
- 19 The King of Kings himself
is there portrayed entire,
in paint and in relief,
with eyes of blue sapphire.
This image seemed to live,
appeared to know me well.
Its lips began to move,
its tongue began to spell.
Music to me the word
which from its mouth I heard!
- 20 "This valiant squire hath braved
the worst! Myself, his gown,
my sire for him engraved,
by whose tears I have grown!"
This said, with royal grace,
requiring to be claimed,
it moved towards my face,
by willing helpers framed.
I ran, by love impelled,
its glory to enfold.
- 21 Towards it I reached out
and, claiming it, made bold
to wrap myself about
entirely in its fold.
Thus robed, I was allowed
to enter Life's high door;
at once my head was bowed,
his Kingship to adore.
Now my own part was done:
let him perform his own!
- 22 There at the princes' gate,
by favour of the King,
I mingled with the great
and shared his Realm with
him.
He said I should appear
beside his Majesty
and offer to him there
the pearl I brought with me:
voices, in worship raised,
his loving promise praised.

I have taken considerable liberties here, as the curious reader can see by consulting my source, the Syriac text in P.-H. Poirier, *L'Hymne de la Perle des Actes de Thomas: Introduction, texte—traduction, commentaire* (Louvain-la-Neuve 1981). The chief flaw in the narrative is that great pains are taken to introduce a companion² for the prince in Egypt, but when the prince wakes from his drugged sleep, this companion is no longer associated with his quest and in fact disappears from the narrative altogether, never to return. This suggests that some material was either censored or lost in transmission, since the narrative is otherwise economical and coherent. By spacing out the second half of the ode with four extra lines about the companion (between square brackets), and with occasional expanded translations adding the equivalent of six more lines, we can mend this flaw, while at the same time solving another problem, namely, that the ten-line stanzas, so clearly marked at the beginning and at the end, get “out of phase” in the middle of the ballad. The resulting speculative reconstruction contains twenty-two stanzas, the number of letters in the Syriac alphabet.³

This ballad was undoubtedly known to Ephrem. He not only worked out the theme of personal reunification and its symbol in the recovery of a “splendid gown”, he also integrated this theme with the idea of the pearl itself, the intrinsic importance of which the ballad never actually explains. He wrote a cycle of five odes on the “Pearl of Great Price” (*de fide* 81-85; cf. Matt. 13,45-6), which are representative of his most mature period. In introducing the parable of the Pearl, Jesus says “The Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant”. Ephrem sees himself in the first instance as this merchant, and his quest, like that of the prince in the ballad, as an “enterprise”. Beginning to close the last ode of the cycle, he writes: “But since, as you see, I have roamed in you, pearl, let me gather my intellect together!” He is like a merchant who has “roamed” far afield and is now bringing his gains back home. It is this idea that I wish to explore in what follows.

“Roaming” is perhaps Ephrem’s favourite description of his poetic art. In the first ode on the pearl he writes: “[The pearl] outgrew for me the Ark in which I had roamed.” This is a reference to the following passage:

² I have called him “anointed”, where the Syriac has “son of anointers”.

³ H.J.W. Drijvers, “Thomasakten”, in *NtLA* II 289-367, includes a translation (344-8) of the Greek version of this ballad in 105 couplets.

My mind wanders, having fallen into the flood of our Saviour's power. Blessed is Noah, who, though his ship, the Ark, floated around over the Flood, yet his soul was recollected. May my faith, Lord, be a ship for my weakness, for the foolish are drowned in the depths of their prying into You. Praises to Him who begot You. (*de fide* 49,6; tr. Brock)

A self-declared cross-reference within the work of this poet is a rare thing. In this article I shall be working on the assumption that he intended his reader to make a far-reaching comparison between the earlier ode on Noah and the Ark and the cycle on the pearl. Like the Ark, Ephrem drifts about on the ocean of phenomena. But he does not "stray" (another translation of the Syriac word represented by "roam" and by "wander") from the Faith, like those who outreach their nature and try to "examine the Lord of the sea" (*de fide* 81,10; tr. Brock). There is a deep irony in the choice of a single word (*PH'*) and its cognates to encapsulate both Ephrem's "quest" and the "research" which he so vehemently rejects. The latter is more concerned to analyse than to reconcile, and assumes that every phenomenon will yield its secrets to the probing of the tiny human brain. Those who work on this assumption are, in Ephrem's eyes, "fools" (*sakhlē*), for all their "intelligence" (*sūkōlō*). Observe, again, the irony of using one verbal root to cover both intelligence and foolishness! It is as if the human intellect were a neutral force, which could be turned by its owner's will in one of two directions, in towards the light or out into the darkness. The first is the direction of the Christian "quest", the latter that of pagan (or "Hellenic") "research". Ephrem's "roaming", like that of the Ark, bears witness to Christ; the "straying" of "Hellenic" thinkers makes doubt an end in itself.

All this will become clearer as we go on. The ode on Noah (*de fide* 49) illustrates the "roaming" theme with a geometrical figure. When this idea is combined with related ideas in Ephrem's cycle on the Pearl, another geometrical figure will be found, which clarifies his intentionally ambivalent language. The same combination of Noah and the Pearl enables us to work out the importance of the "mercantile" activities of weighing and multiplication in Ephrem's poetry. For various reasons, it will be better to begin with these two and to treat the geometrical aspect at the end. It, too, can be harmonized with the metaphor of a merchant, because his enterprise involves a round-about journey.

This article combines three aims: to introduce the reader to Syriac poetry in general and to Ephrem in particular; to present an anthology of five complete examples of such poetry in read-

able verse-renderings (on which, incidentally, the copyright is my own); and to analyze some of the models of the Christian and the poetic vocation suggested by Ephrem. The execution of this last and most difficult task has occasioned several discoveries which should be new even to specialists in Syriac. The first aim has not been pursued with academic rigour and the interested reader will need to read the handbooks on Syriac literature and to follow up the titles for further reading which are given in a note at the end. The second aim should not be understood as an exercise in philological exactitude, although I hope that my renderings, while free, are still true to the original.⁴ My purpose here is to present the poems with something of their original charm and in a form closely reflecting that of the originals, so that they can be sung and loved by those familiar with my own mother-tongue.⁵ Literal translations demand a great deal of unrewarded effort on the part of the reader, who may not recognize them as poetry at all.

⁴ I intend to justify my readings and interpretations in philological publications including the Syriac text and a detailed commentary.

⁵ Any readers wanting to sing or listen to these canticles are at liberty to write to me at the Department of the Study of Religions, School of Oriental and African Studies, Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square, London WC1H 0XG, from where I will send them a catalogue of tape-recordings, sung to melodies of my own or simply read out loud. Those who wish to get some idea of traditional chanting in the Syrian Orthodox Church may wish to obtain the recently reissued recordings on stereo compact disc No. D-8039, label: Auvidis/UNESCO (1983/1992).

2 THE BALANCE

An Ode on Noah and the Ark (*de fide* 49)

- 1 O noble Noah, successful when set against all others!
When weighed for good works, their scale soared, his sank;
armed with innocence, one soul won the match.
The losers, lightweights, foundered in the flood;
in the Ark's high hold was poised, pure as gold, God's elect of old!

Chorus: Glory, Lord, to Thee!

- 2 That saint's service spanned two ages of earth: two figures he
formed! The spent age he sealed, and opened our own;
maintained at the mean twin signs twixt the twain.
Those rot and rise not, these are called and come;
the old he interred, the new-born race reared: his Choser be
cheered!
- 3 Afloat in the flood, the All-Ruler's Ark emerged from the East;
she winged to the West, wheeled South and then sealed
the North with her nest; in waters thus whirled,
to clay she declared what His Birth would be:
all-encompassing, much-multiplying. To her Saviour sing!
- 4 Her sequence sketched her Defender's Device: her course traced a
cross!
With water and wood, Noah, salt of the sea,
the Church did portray; by the theme of three
her sailors he saved; the Dove brought a branch,
but the Ghost did give that Oil of olive, by whose Light all live!
- 5 Myth and mystery, Ark and Torah tell the self-same story!
That wooden womb was unburdened of beasts,
as types in the texts their burden have borne.
The Anointed answered to the Scripture's sign;
naves echo the Ark, whose meaning they mark: Thy Church hails
Thee, hark!
- 6 My mind meanders, fallen in the flood of our Saviour's
Strength!
Albeit the Ark drifts on the deluge,
Noah, like his name, is calm, collected.
Faith (though I be frail) shall be, Lord, my ship!
All those drown in doubt, who would work Thee out! To
Thy Sire we shout!

In *de fide* 49 Ephrem unambiguously evokes the image of the balance. In stanza one, Noah is “set against” the rest of his generation—an unequal comparison, for, numerically, they outweigh him. On the other hand, “when weighed for good works”, the others prove as light as a million particles of dust, while the “one soul” of Noah, like a single pearl, plunges in its scale. When it comes to the flood, it is the quality, not the quantity, that counts: Noah’s scale floats upwards by virtue of his “weighty” gold-like purity, while the scale of the rest “founders”, not because of their heavier number, but precisely because they are moral “light-weights”. In recitation, the bard might have represented these three swings with his outstretched arms, looking in turn at the “scales” which were his open palms. For this is what he pictures Noah as doing in stanza two: he is the pivotal bar, “spanning” two ages.

To follow this imagery through is to reach a conclusion shocking to a twentieth-century reader; it obliges us to admit that, whatever “balance” may have meant to Ephrem, it did not include open-mindedness with regard to other faiths. According to the Church, Christianity fulfilled the *raison d’être* of Judaism, which existed to “prepare the way” for Christ. Ideally, therefore, Christ Himself spans “two ages”, that of Judaism, on the one hand, and that of Christianity, on the other. To compare Christ, then, to Noah, is to suggest that Judaism should have passed away at His Birth (just as Noah’s generation perished to a man) to make room for the “new-born race” of Christians. But, however intemperate his anti-Judaic language may be at times, Ephrem would surely always stand by the balanced statement of *de fide* 20,12:

Nothing can divide the wings of love and truth.
Truth can never fly without the help of love;
love alone can never reach the skies above,
for one Will yokes them both.

As for the bad taste of his anti-Jewish jokes, for example, where he makes fun of their predilection for garlic (which is, after all, a medicinal herb of great benefit to humanity), it seems that the Jews were so powerful in Mesopotamia, even in the second half of the fourth century, that such crude humour may have fulfilled a need in the Christian community of Edessa comparable to the need of women to undermine by ribaldry the dominant male in a society like our own. The power of men makes similar jokes at the expense of women tasteless; conversely, the vulnerability of

Ephrem's religious community should be weighed in mitigation against the violence of his anti-Jewish sentiments.⁶

a. Balance in an isolated stanza

The three great swings of the compass in stanza three of *de fide* 49 seem to echo the three vertical swings of the scales in stanza one. The vessel, "in waters thus whirled", may be envisaged as rolling, pitching and tossing, yet staying afloat thanks to the equipoise of its construction. It is described as a bird, whose dipping, balanced flight and roaming, flitting movement might equally be compared to the swinging of the scales. Three swings of the scales might be needed to bring them into equipoise: a stone will be placed on one side, a piece of gold heavier than it on the other, then another stone will be added to the counterweight to compensate for the difference. By this token a "roaming" movement is not incompatible with internal balance. In the sixth stanza, Noah, whose name means "he was in repose", is contrasted with the Ark in which he sails: he is "collected", while the Ark, like the poet, "drifts". Noah, initially depicted as sitting in one scale of the balance, then as spanning two ages like two scales, now seems immobile, like the fulcrum of the bar or the pivot of a stabilizer in a modern ship.

Like the first, the sixth stanza plays by its form on the image of a balance. The opening *terzain* of five-syllable units (the units are marked in my version by alliterative clusters) makes the poet swim, the closing *quintain* puts him aboard ship. On the other hand, the swimmer is borne up on the flood, as opposed to the doubters, who "drown." The ups and the downs of either scale seem to cancel each other out. Between these two "scales", the *terzain* and the *quintain*, is the internally balanced, even-numbered *quatrain*, in which the "drifting Ark" is compared with its "collected" captain. Stanzas three and four have shown that the "roaming" of the Ark is just as important a witness to the Truth as the immobility of the sage who sails her. So the *quatrain* of the last stanza is in equipoise as to quality, as well.

This suggests that Ephrem chose this particular stanza to reflect the theme we have detected, that of an unequally weighted balance, which attains a certain evenness at last. Three and five seem

⁶ See H. Schreckenberg, *Die christlichen Adversus-Judaeos-Texte und ihr literarisches und historisches Umfeld: 1.-11. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt etc. 1990²), 286-92.

to swing in the scales, supported by the pivotal bar of four. By quantity, five outweighs three, but by quality, three is the superior number; in the end, however, though three is the number of the Trinity, five is the measure of man's indirect approach to God, through his five senses, clarified by the healing effect of the five wounds of Christ.

The five odes on the pearl display this symbol in their number. We shall come back to the symbolism of the number five in the following sections. Let us look now at the first ode on the pearl (*de fide* 81). The image of the balance is implicit both in its form and in its burden. We find a stanza like that of the ode on Noah, except that the five-syllable units have been replaced by four-syllable units and that the closing quintain has been replaced by a *terzain*, exactly balancing the form of the opening *terzain*. The central quatrain is carefully pivoted about the mid-point of the ten-unit stanza. The *terzains*, to either side of it, have a "rounded" feel to them, like pearls. Take *de fide* 81,2 (here in my free poetic rendering):⁷

On open palm I weighed her with devouring eyes.
One face was all that I had sought;
her myriad masks defied my thought.
The facets of the Bright One's Child defeat the wise.

The "open palm" is evidently a scale on one side, even though the Syriac does not make explicit the metaphor of weighing. (On occasion, I have incorporated an interpretative gloss of my own.) On it is placed the pearl, which our "merchant," the poet, "scrutinises". The central quatrain seems to represent the swing which takes place when the "Bright One's Child", who is Christ (that "Light" which the darkness could not "grasp"), is placed in the opposite scale. He, too, is a many-faceted jewel, like the pearl. At this stage we may formulate a rule-of-thumb: Weigh up the opening and the closing *terzains* of each stanza against one another. I shall be applying this in the third section of this article, where I shall comment on *de fide* 81.

⁷ All unattributed translations in this article are mine. They are either literal, in which case they make no attempt to be readable and so give an ungainly impression untrue to the original, or they are paraphrases, designed to convey the same ideas in a recognizably Ephremic style, without necessarily being true to the letter of his language. In the former case, I have indicated where the language is ambivalent, e.g. "*sign/mystery*" represents *rōzō*, which many scholars translate as "symbol". In the latter case, I have kept Ephrem's metres and, emboldened by Ephrem's occasional use of rhyme and alliteration, have used these to bring out the balance and the numbers inherent in his stanzas.

b. Balance in a group of three stanzas

Elsewhere in the cycle, Ephrem also uses a group of three stanzas as the two scales and the pivotal bar which make up the balance. For example, he ends the fifth and last ode with this trio:⁸

- 11 O pearl, I've roamed in thee! Let me collect my mind!
From gazing let me be like thee,
collected whole in thine own place!
Eternally be unified in thee would I!
- 12 To forge the Son a crown have I collected pearls.
Take, then, this gift of tainted limbs!
Thou hast no need of this, I know;
because I need thy cleansing have I made these hymns!
- 13 The diadem is forged entire of worded pearls;
not gold, but love, it has for clasp;
the band which binds it is the Faith;
not hands, but praise, shall lift it up to God on High!

The first of these three stanzas is devoted to the pearl, unalteringly "collected" in its own place, like Noah in stanza six of *de fide* 49, as opposed to the poet, who "roams", since he is still engaged in the activity of "collecting". The roundness of this image (or rather, as I shall argue, of both these images, for the "roaming" is a centred movement) is balanced by the roundness of the "diadem of pearls" in the last stanza. The second stanza, by contrast, presents an opposition: the "tainted limbs", as against the offered "hymns". It is almost as if the Judge of Souls, balance in hand, were being offered this gift in compensation for the poet's own lack of weight!

So much for the form; and what of the burden? On one occasion, Ephrem makes explicit the notion that he is balancing his pearl against the eternal Pearl, which is Christ. Here are the closing stanzas of ode four (*de fide* 84):

- 13 Thy scale cannot be weighed against the scale of Christ;
the deep sea's womb gave birth to thee,
His Origin is in the Highest:
like thee, yet not like thee, but like His Father, He!
- 14 Yet story tells that thou, too, from twin wombs art sprung!
From heaven dropped a nature free,
a body fixed rose from the sea:
thy second birth revealed that thou for men dost long!

⁸ Here I have departed from my normal rhyming scheme (ABBA; the most common variant is chiasitic: ABAB) to spread it over three stanzas (xxxA xBxB xxxA).

- 15 Embodied to be grasped by us, thy light was drilled,
 affixed to brows of royalty
 (for "crown", like "cross", spells "victory"),
 and spread, like words, in people's ears across the world!

Here, as in ode five, the first of the three concluding stanzas, which expresses the failure of the pearl as a counterweight to Christ, is balanced by the last, where we find an example of that breathtaking symbolic potential which makes this natural symbol, for Ephrem as a poet, a successful counterweight for Christ, at least as a source of integrated imagery for meditation. The whole of the second stanza of this group fulfils the pivotal function normally fulfilled by the central quatrain of a stanza.

c. Balance in an entire ode

The balance is sometimes also a helpful image in understanding the overall structure of an ode. The second half of the first ode on the pearl, for example, is best seen as a counterweight to the first, not as its negation (this ode is quoted entire at the end of section 3, below). Intuition on its own is too one-sided; it needs holy fear as a counterbalance to bring it into equipoise.⁹ We should not be deceived by the subdued note on which the ode concludes: this does not mean that the poet has come down on the side of fear and rejected boldness. Fear on its own is equally unbalanced. By ending with a passive attitude, Ephrem creates a need for a new series of creative insights; he sets up a kind of oscillation which will carry him through to ode two, where, however, the poet approaches the pearl with respect, from a certain distance. Here, again, are the three swings which bring the balance into equipoise.

The movement of ode one from one extreme to the other is underlined by a whole range of contrasts. The "bright dawn" implicit in the combination of the words "one" and "day" with which the ode begins and in the time of day at which the manna of

⁹ Intuition, if it is true, will soon discover its own limits. The world of sense is, for Ephrem, a web of veils through which we can feel, though we cannot see, the divine world. He calls the latter "the veiled" and the former "the revealed". But sometimes he turns this around. God has lifted the outer veils to give us a closer view, through the inner veils of Christ's Body and of Holy Scripture, of Himself. By contrast with these incarnate and articulate "revelations" the sketchy and inarticulate images conveyed by the rest of the world of sense may be called "veiled". A good deal has been written on Ephrem's language of "the veiled and the revealed"; for a provisional orientation, see Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 14-15, and *Hymns on Paradise*, 42 ff.

stanza eight was collected by the Hebrews, gives way to the dusk implicit in the Hebrews' other daily meal, which is made to correspond with the second half of the ode (Exod. 16,12-13.21-2). This contrast is heightened by the light and clarity of stanzas two and three, the radiant Shekinah and the splendid glow of the rainbow in stanza four, the "brilliant deeds" of stanza five, the bright sun of stanza six and the clear sky of stanza seven, on the one hand; and, on the other hand, by the "other rain" heralded by the thunderclouds of stanza seven (a cloudburst as opposed to the dew-fall which was the "former rain"; cf. Deut. 11,14), the communicational "black-out" of stanza nine, the opacity of the sea's horizons in stanza ten, the unsearchableness of its depths in stanza eleven, the destructive storm of stanza twelve, the doom-laden tales of stanza thirteen, and the subaqueous gloom of the three last stanzas, spoken by the fish.

Yet dusk, according to the Jewish and the Christian calendars, actually comes before the dawn, and the "sweets" of intuition should rightly follow on the "meats" of revelation (stanza eight). In the same way, the Liturgy of the Word precedes the celebration of the Eucharistic Mysteries.¹⁰ The reversal of these natural orders creates in the reader's mind a certain anxiety that their proper order should be restored. Ode two then begins reassuringly with a request for the spiritual communication from the pearl which had come last in ode one; and ode five culminates in the allegory of stanza eight, where the "good news" is followed by the distribution of the "medicine of life".

In addition to the order of the Liturgy, the original context of the parable of the pearl in Matt. 13 is reversed in ode one. There Jesus dismisses the obtuse crowd on the lakeside and retires to "the house" to teach the inner circle of his disciples. In Ephrem's ode, the opening scene evokes the inner circle of the baptized, congregated in the church-building, whereas, in the second half, the images are gradually adjusted, until we can visualise a crowd of aspirant (but rather obtuse) initiates in close proximity to a shoal of fishes in the sea.

Associations on either side of the central divide in this ode are like weights of complementary value piled up on either scale of the balance: the veiled and the shown, intuition and doctrine,

¹⁰ Jerome tells us (*De uiris illustribus* 115) that Ephrem's works were recited in some churches after the scriptural lections, in which context *de fide* 81 would have performed a unifying function, binding the two halves of the Liturgy chiastically and internally together.

Nature and Scripture, Sacrament and Text, the Eucharist and Baptism, voice and silence. The total weight on either side is symbolized by the total stanzas in either half: eight, the number of fullness and of life.

d. Measured speech

Ephrem himself held up the balance as a measure of correct method in Christian philosophy, poetry and prayer (cf. Ecclesiasticus 28,25).

Whoever tackles his scales
morning and night, him I bless!
By weighing questions he tells
which of them is in excess.
(*de fide* 2,10)

Poetry is defined in the Syriac language as “speech in measures” and contrasted thus with the “untrammelled speech” which we call prose. Good prose is measured and not loose; yet the requirements of poetic form impose a discipline which obliges a writer to weigh his words with extraordinary care. Our first attempt to analyze the formal framework within which Ephrem chose to work has revealed that one of his “measures” was conceptualized as the measure of weight. This applies to the content as well as to the form. Ephrem’s search for ever more apposite expressions bracketing the inexpressible Truth on every side involves a never-ending process of fine adjustment. So a painter goes on mixing colours but can only approximate to the unpaintable colour in his mind’s eye. In all measurement and judgement number is indispensable. It is time to investigate the role of the numerical measure in Ephrem’s poetry. If the image of the balance reflects the poet’s good taste and judgement, then that of the abacus corresponds to another of his qualities, namely fertility of imagination.

3 THE FRUIT OF MULTIPLICATION

In stanza one of the ode on Noah we see clearly the beginning of a series. Ephrem puts “one soul” in his balance. “Noble”, “innocent”, and “pure”, it displays a correlation between its number and its character, which is that of integrity. The counterweight is the rest of Noah’s generation; but however much the balance swings, the match remains unequal. As this one-sidedness under-

lines the dual aspect of the image, so that duality emphasizes in its turn the uniqueness of Noah. The rejection of the first counter-weight leads to the adoption of another, Christ, in the second stanza; and this is an image of "full" duality, in which both parties count. Yet Noah's integrity and uniqueness only exist by virtue of Christ's. Type and reality are, in a sense, both two and one. We see here how the image of the balance can generate an arithmetical series, the third member of which is found in the three swings of the balance and in the pivotal bar on which the two scales swing. Besides giving momentum to the development of the poem, these numbers generate the themes which are dealt with in the successive stanzas.

Stanza one of this ode thus contains the numbers one, two and three and stanza two, likewise, contains the numbers two, three and four; indeed, the pattern continues to the end, as I shall now explain.

Two is obvious enough in the comparison between Noah and Christ and in the insistence of stanza two on "two ages", "two figures", "twin signs" etc. Three is clear, too, in the Syriac, where we find three synonymous expressions of the contrast between the ages: past and present, first and last, old and new. As to four, the word "two" occurs four times in the original text of the stanza.

Stanza three is more subtle. It alludes to each Person of the Holy Trinity. The Father is the "All-Ruler" who owns the Ark, the Son is the "Saviour" whose Nativity is heralded by that vessel, the Holy Ghost is the Ark itself, hovering like a bird and flitting to and fro over the Flood, as the Spirit "brooded over the surface of the waters" in Gen. 1,2. Then there are the three legs of the Ark's circuitous journey, the four points of the compass, and the fifth point marked by the Ark between them, when its journey northwards crosses the wake of its journey to the west.

Four can be seen in the Cross, with which stanza four begins, five in the types of water, wood, salt, sailors, olive-branch, and six in the sum of these five and that other type, the sequence of the movements of the Ark.

Stanza five contains five separate statements. It also yields three pairs of concepts, making six: the Ark and the Torah, the disembarkation of the animals and the decipherment of types, the myth of the Ark and the reality of Christ's Church.

These figures create a radiating wave-pattern, which sustains the movement of the poem towards its end. At a deeper level, we may find a clue to the meaning of the pattern in the Syriac of the

first section of stanza five, where we read the words: “bear witness one to the other”. This is an allusion to Ps. 19, which begins: “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handy-work. One day telleth another; and one night certifieth another.” The numerical network can thus be seen as an icon illustrating the correlation of all phenomena, which bears witness, in Ephrem’s view, to their one Creator.

But there is more to the series than its technical and iconic aspects. We have already seen how the one of the first, the two of the second and the three of the third stanzas were related by their substance. Does the substance of stanzas four, five and six also reflect the “nature” of their numbers in the series?

The best approach to number-symbolism in Saint Ephrem is to ignore other patristic authorities and to study Ephrem’s own work and its major source, the Bible. Any hypothesis about the associations of a number elicited from *de fide* 49 will be strengthened, if it can be shown that the same associative cluster is attested by an equally numbered stanza of another “serial” ode. It so happens that *de fide* 81, the first of the cycle on the pearl, provides an example of such “serial” composition. For the purposes of the close reading which follows here, I give a literal translation of stanzas one to eight, placing each stanza at the head of the section on that stanza. A poetic rendering of the complete ode will be given at the end of this commentary. The letters “a”, “b”, and “c” indicate the opening *terzain*, the pivotal *quatrain* and the closing *terzain*, respectively (compare my description of the stanza in section 2, above).

i. Stanza one

- a One day (even more literally: on one of the days) I took
a pearl, my brethren.
- b I saw in *it/her signs/mysteries, sons/children* of the
kingdom, images and types of that greatness.
- c *It/she* became of *itself/herself* a source and I drank from
it/her the *signs/mysteries* of the son.

Chorus: Blessed he that constructed with the pearl a
parable/riddle of the kingdom on high!

The chorus alludes to Matt. 13,45-6, the parable of the pearl-merchant. Origen’s commentary on this passage had set an agenda for Christian scholars: to match up, as far as possible, all that the Ancients knew (or thought they knew) about the natural history of the pearl with their theological view of Jesus as the Word of

God incarnate. Ephrem takes up this challenge, making "greatness", or "majesty", the unifying theme of his cycle, perhaps because he lived in the century of the first Christian emperors. At the end, he will offer his cycle to God as a "crown of eloquent pearls". The fact that stanza one announces this theme is appropriate. Like Noah in his generation and the Emperor in the Mediterranean world, God is unique in the universe.

The pearl itself is "in all time one", like Noah. Indeed, Noah is contrasted, in *de fide* 49,6, with the poet, who, as we read in *de fide* 85,11, is still longing for the unification the mythical Noah long before achieved:

But since, as you see, I have roamed in you, pearl, let me gather my intellect together! And, for that I have looked upon you, let me be assimilated to you, whose whole being is gathered together in the place where you are! And, for that in all time you are one, let me become one through you!

As *de fide* 82 shows, Ephrem had in mind no ordinary pearl, such as may be found sharing its oyster with other pearls, but a great, solitary, "only begotten" pearl, of the kind to which the Romans referred as *unio*. The word is used by Shakespeare:

The King shall drink to Hamlet's better breath
and in the cup an Union shall he throw,
richer than that which four successive Kings
in Denmark's Crown have worn.
(*Hamlet* 3496-9; Act 5, scene 2, lines 282-5)

Ephrem makes it plain that his pearl deserves nothing less than the place of honour on the Crown of the King of Kings. In the "Union", therefore, we find three themes in one: unification, uniqueness, and majesty.

The Eucharistic terminology of stanza one is unmistakable. Applying the rule-of-thumb formulated in the previous section, that the two tercets should be balanced as to their contents, we find Ephrem's "taking" of the "pearl", which is an expression used in the early Church for the consumption of the Host, balanced against his "drinking" of the "mysteries of the Son". Surely we should see in this an allusion to the two elements, the bread and the wine, of Holy Communion? Through such Communion, the believer has a foretaste of the "eternal unification" in Christ which Ephrem longs for (*de fide* 85,11). But this is not the only link between the Eucharist and the number one. This sacrament, though celebrated on other days as well, is properly a celebration of Christ's resurrection from the dead on the first day of the

week. By addressing the "children of the Kingdom" (Matt. 13,38) as "my brethren", Ephrem suggests he is speaking in the congregation of the baptized (cf. Heb. 2,12). The first words of the ode are: "One day." This seems too banal. It is not like Ephrem to waste words. The Syriac can be stretched to yield the sense: "On the day which is numbered one." That would be either Sunday, or the first day of Creation, or both. The idea that both could be meant reminds us that Christ's resurrection was seen as the dawn of a new Creation. Besides, on day one, God said, "Let there be light!" And light, as we have seen, predominates throughout the first half of this ode.

The first stanza of *de fide* 81 turns out to be a meditation on the number one, harmonized with the poet's source of inspiration, the pearl, and its associations. It boldly announces the main theme of the cycle, majesty, and subtly suggests a unifying motif of the first eight stanzas, light. It also justifies the poet's enterprise. His meditation is analogous to Holy Communion. It is another means of attaining unification in Christ.

At the end of the cycle Ephrem brings us back to the moment in which he, the merchant, "took" the pearl in his "hand's palm":

- 6 Bare bodies plunged, O pearl, and from the deep brought thee.
Kings were not first to find thy place:
the naked gave thee to our race,
sign of the poor, the fishermen of Galilee.
- 7 Bodies in clothes thy sanctum could not penetrate.
Those who came there entombed their flesh
and plunged to thee like babies, bare!
How much they loved, thou didst desire them demonstrate.
- 8 Good news of thee they spread before their treasure-trove,
which, poor among the merchants, they
took out and showed, that all might pray,
and raise their palms, like dying men, its power to prove.

These are stanzas six to eight of the fifth ode, *de fide* 85. Number-symbolism is less prominent in the other odes than in the first half of ode one. But it cannot be a coincidence that stanza eight of ode five is an allegory of the Eucharist. The Gospels say Jesus rose from the dead "on the first day of the week", but early Christian writers universally identified this as the dawning of the "eighth day", on which the "sun" of Christ's Love would never set. Ephrem uses the same trick in stanza eight of ode one. Analogously, the eighth note of the octave is the same as the first.

If Ephrem is one of the "merchants" in the allegory of *de fide*

85,8, then the “divers” must be priests, administering the sacrament (itself designated in the Syriac by one of Ephrem’s favourite terms for the Host: “the medicine of life”). This tallies with the identification of the “pearl-fishers” with the “fishers of men” (*de fide* 85,6; cf. Matt. 4,19). Yet in *de fide* 81,2, the poet “places” the pearl on his own “hand’s palm”; this suggests that he unites in his own person the roles of “diver” and of “merchant”, not indeed literally as a priest (Ephrem died a deacon), although in a sense all the baptized are “kings and priests” (Rev. 1,6),¹¹ but metaphorically, in his capacity as a poet. This in turn tallies with the second half of ode one (*de fide* 81,9-16), where the pearl herself compares the poet to a pearl-fisher.

The faithful consume the Host; but the merchant weighs and scrutinises his pearl, which is what Ephrem describes himself as doing in stanza two. The “hand’s palm” we have already seen as one of a pair of scales, opposite which is placed the counter-weight: Christ. Normally, a merchant would weigh an ordinary stone against the pearl (cf. *de fide* 86,9: “they used the Pearl, like any stone, for weighing with”). But Ephrem does not make the mistake of treating Christ, the “pearl of great price”, like “any stone”. He has a proper reverence for this mysteriously perfect figure, full of light (cf. *de fide* 84,8). In stanza two, one pearl, assimilated to the Eucharist, is weighed against the Pearl of prior rank, of which, like Noah, it is a type. As in *de fide* 49,1-2, the poet develops his meditation from the theme of one to that of two by means of the image of a balance, though the metaphor is not linguistically labelled as such in *de fide* 81.

ii. Stanza two

- a I placed *it/her*, my brethren, on the palm of my hand to scrutinise *it/her*.
- b I was expecting (even more literally: I was going) to see *it/her* from one side; *it/she* became of *itself/herself* faces from all sides.
- c This investigation of the son escapes all pursuit because in its totality it is light.

There is more to the duality encapsulated in stanza two than the idea of comparison alone. If stanza one is a monologue, in stanza two a kind of dialogue begins. “Taking” the pearl had been like a

¹¹ Cf. S.P. Brock, “The Priesthood of the Baptized: Some Syriac Perspectives”, *Sobornost* 9,2 (1987) 14-22.

sexual conquest. A pierced pearl, like a tightly clamped oyster opened and consumed, is a universal image of a virgin deflowered. Besides, the pearl, feminine by gender, has female associations as an ornament, and as a name ("Margaret" and its equivalents). With the eagerness and confidence a bold lover might display, the poet claims as his own the insight that the pearl is a counterpart to Christ. But that statement is deceptively compact. Its simplicity kaleidoscopes, on closer inspection, into a baffling complexity. It is as if the arrogance of sexual possession were rebuffed by the untouchable mystery of the "object" of desire. The lover comes to recognize that object as a "subject" like himself. The words "I saw" recur in every stanza, up to the first part of stanza six; but, at the same time, the perception grows that the mysteries of the pearl are unfathomable. In the second half of the ode, the positions are reversed. The poet listens receptively to the wisdom of the object of his love, who speaks to him with the authority of his Lord.¹²

Another aspect of duality is polarity. For example, the polarity between love, hungry to know the beloved, and reason, humbled by her mystery (read Murray, "A Dialogue", on this). It is this dialogue between love and reason which balances *de fide* 81, as we saw at the end of the previous section. In stanza two, the opening *terzain* expresses love (cf. *de fide* 83,1: "Drunk with thy love, the merchant strips thy clothes off"), whereas the closing *terzain* sums up the argument of reason. The quatrain presents another polarity: that between simplicity and infinity. Like God, the pearl displays both. A sphere is a polyhedron with an infinite number of facets. While neither oneness, nor infinity, is divisible, the association of infinity with the number two suggests division. It is as if to count beyond one were to begin to divide and multiply, opening up a vista on infinity. This could be an icon of the human condition. Like the questing prince of Saint Thomas's ballad, man discovers after his childhood a longing to be reunited, though he does not yet know how. Unlike Plato's hemispherical semi-people, who went about looking for their other halves and experienced reunification through sexual intercourse, Ephrem strives to unite both "sexes" in himself at a level above that of sexual union, and prays to be "unified" in Christ by divine

¹² Note that the pearl begins to speak in the tenth stanza. Ten can be written as *yūdh* in Syriac, the first letter of Jesus's Name (*de natiuitate* 27,2). Ten is also the number of the Mosaic Commandments, so it is no surprise to find a prohibition in the closing *terzain*: "Thou shalt not probe into the Lord of the sea!"

Grace.¹³ Communion with God through the Eucharist or through the poetic "search" is a repeated "act of love", in which the ultimate reunification is anticipated.

To divide is to multiply. The "merchant" of Mt 13,45-6 has been revealed here as a "lover"; whether through sexual reproduction, or through the art of making a profit, both lovers and merchants are engaged in a process of multiplication. By the time Ephrem reaches the end of his cycle, his single pearl has become many pearls (*de fide* 85,12).¹⁴ Like many early Christians, especially in Syria, Ephrem propagated virginity as an ideal; nevertheless, by his poetic art he obeys the divine command to "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1,28).

The unity of God seems antithetical to the plurality of phenomena. The fourth aspect of duality suggested by stanza two is the paradox. "To be divided in one's mind" is to doubt; and doubt is the condition of a mind which sees a paradox, without having the confidence that there is an unseen whole, in which both sides of that paradox can be stated with truth. The Christian poet loves a paradox, because contradictory truths are to him evidences of one great unstatable Truth. By posing a riddle and then enabling his reader to solve it, Ephrem "imitates" the movement of the soul through an intellectual quandary towards enlightenment. The solution of the ultimate paradoxes cannot, of course, be given in human language. But it is more than just a game to find paradoxes and then to solve them; for Ephrem, this game is God-like and demonstrates that the human brain is created "in the image" of the divine Intelligence.

To illustrate Ephrem's technique with paradox, let us take the parentage of the pearl. Ode one contradicts itself on this subject. Stanza six calls the pearl "the daughter of the bright one" (that the sun is meant is shown by *de fide* 84,7), whereas in stanza ten the pearl introduces herself as "the daughter of the unconfined sea". The sea is of masculine gender, so cannot be the mother. Besides, the pearl's mother is the oyster. Thus, in *de fide* 82,2, Ephrem writes:

¹³ Syriac etymology was Ephrem's ally in portraying the neuter gender as a "type" of the reconciliation brought about by the Faith, by which the contradictions of human nature are healed, for *mhaymnō* ("eunuch") can also be translated as "believer" and "man of integrity".

¹⁴ Whether the "crown" of five odes or the "necklace" of seventy-two stanzas (cf. Luke 10,1) is meant is left open by the non-specific plural.

Thy mother is the virgin sweet-heart of the sea.
 Unknown by him, in him she dived;
 unwedded, there her child conceived.
 Thy type upbraids Jewesses when they dangle thee!

This suggests that the sea is the pearl's adoptive father, as Jesus was known in Nazareth as "the carpenter's son" (Matt. 13,55). But it begs a further question: how can the pearl be a perfect type of Christ, if it was born, albeit of a virgin, at the bottom of the sea? Christ's origin, as *de fide* 84,13 formulates the problem, is "in the Highest". The solution to this quandary lies in the myth of the pearl's heavenly origin ("Yet story tells that thou, too, of two wombs art sprung"). The way that Ephrem supports his type here with a myth shows that he is playing a game, albeit with a serious intention. He is a sacred riddler.¹⁵

iii. Stanza three

- a In that clearness of *it/her* I saw the clear one, that he cannot be troubled.
- b And in *its/her* cleanness a great *sign/mystery*, the body of our lord, that it is pure.
- c In *its/her* undividedness I saw the truth, that it cannot be divided.

The preoccupation with paradox is suggested already in stanza two, which turns out to be another meditation on a number. As this meditation on the number two goes deeper than the relatively transparent imagery of *de fide* 49,2, so the idiom of *de fide* 81 requires something more subtle in stanza three than the earlier ode's evocation of the Holy Trinity. On the surface, all is transparent. The clear tripartite message matches the tripartite form of the stanza. This message concerns Christ, "the Clear One", "our Lord", "the Truth". The three names are accompanied by the three constituents of Christ's wholeness as a human being: clarity (of mind), cleanness of body (and so of the channels of perception) and truth, in the sense of integrity. Compare *de fide* 20,17:

May the prayer within me clear my cluttered heart;
 and may faith restore my outward sense's sheen!
 Single, though divided, may this human being
 find Union at Thy Court!

¹⁵ A good example is found in the first ode: the "wealth" within the pearl's "womb" outgrows its mother's parent, the sea, itself a "child" of "the womb of God's Eternity" (*de fide* 81,10-11; cf. Job 38,8).

The "infinite aspects" of stanza two appear to be capable, like the Godhead, of a trinitarian description. The respective places of "clearness" and of the truth correspond to those occupied by the eagerness of love and intellectual humility, respectively, in stanza two. If we apply once more the image of a balance to this stanza, the "body" plays the role of the pivotal bar. It is as if the senses (Ephrem often makes "limbs" almost synonymous with "senses"¹⁶), in themselves morally neutral, occasion the division of the heart, which is, according to Ephrem, the major ailment of mankind. Yet God's Grace, poured out through Christ's Wounds, is extended to mankind through the senses, too; the believer's quest along these sacramental channels can lead to a perfect marriage of love and truth, by which division is healed.

On the face of it, there is nothing oppositional about stanza three. But the way Ephrem insists on his three verbal participles, one positive, with one negative on either side, all of a similar grammatical and phonetic form, suggests that he is contradicting an unheard voice. This voice might have been that of the Arian theologians whom Ephrem opposed. These theologians liked to cite passages from the Gospels which could be read as evidence that Jesus was less than perfect. Three such passages are John 12,27 (Jesus was "troubled"), Mark 1,9 (Jesus received the baptism of repentance) and Mark 14,36 (Jesus made a distinction between his will and his Father's). For Ephrem, Nature and Scripture "bear witness to one another", provided that both are interpreted along the lines laid down by the anti-Arian Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325. This means that an Arian reading of Scripture can be opposed, as in stanza three, with an appeal to the alternative authority of a natural symbol. However, that such a symbol can be sufficient as a source of enlightenment is implicitly negated precisely by Ephrem's explicit affirmation of that sufficiency in *de fide* 81,8. This stanza states one extreme, the ability of the pearl to satisfy the poet without any written revelation, but its very comparison with manna conveys the message that the natural symbol is not sufficient on its own for the nourishment of the soul. The third "swing of the balance" is expressed in the fact that Scripture is evoked to affirm the value of natural symbolism: the reader must conclude that the poet finds both equally necessary.

In Ephrem's opinion, Arians have divided minds and so see

¹⁶ For example, *de fide* 75,9-10: "Three senses, then, are powerless to probe this small sun fixed upon the firmament. / Were all thy limbs but organs, they could not invade the absolute Divinity!"

everything as divided, even Christ. This makes them a divisive influence in the Church. That he is thinking of the Arians in stanza three appears from a parallel passage in *de fide* 86,15:

Show those bold men the symbol of thy beauty, pearl!
Thy myriad masks confuse their view
and make them stray, with mind awl.
Cleaving, the cleft are cloven by the all-even jewel!

Unlike the pearl, which can be sawn in pieces, the Truth is inviolate; the true Church, Ephrem believes, will survive the attack (*de fide* 84,9-10). The pearl resembles the Faith by its "all-evenness", for by virtue of this the stone "breaks" those who "fall upon it" (cf. Luke 20,18). This "all-evenness" can be expressed in arithmetic by the number eight, which fractures the number five when it is divided by it; for five signifies, amongst other things, the human quest. Light, though infinitely productive, is indivisible (*de fide* 84,11). All that a divided mind can do is to fragment its own vision (cf. *de fide* 86,9: "The beam they see they smother with their grasping hands"). Not only is Christ, the Truth, incapable of doubt; the Catholic Faith is also, for our poet, incapable of being fragmented by its critics.

Truth has an evident affinity with the image of the balance. It is less obvious why "clearness" should be associated with equilibrium. That Ephrem made this association is suggested by a passage from his epic *Joseph*,¹⁷ the merchants in the market-place are distracted by the sight of Joseph, visibly affected by emotion:

Balancers forgot to weigh;
calculations were disturbed.
Such sighs took men's breath away:
heart so clear so much perturbed!
(*Joseph* 155)

One needs a clear head to calculate and a well-oiled set of scales to make an accurate measurement of weight. Trouble in the human heart is like fog in the air or grit in the joints of a measuring instrument. Somewhere along these lines, perhaps, we should seek the connection between *shafyūthō* "clarity" and the balance.

¹⁷ Ephrem's authorship was denied by A. Baumstark, *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur* (Bonn 1922) 62-3, but there is no real case against the ascription. The diction and ideas are identical with Ephrem's own and much too good for Balai, who did, however, compose the inferior appendix on the translation of Joseph's relics to Constantinople. The confusion between the author of the epic and the author of this supplement occurs in one early manuscript, which Baumstark favours for its age alone against the otherwise unanimous manuscript tradition.

iv. Stanza four

- a *It/she* became of *itself/herself* Mary, that I saw there the clean pregnancy of her.
- b *It/she* became of *itself/herself* the church and the son within *it/her*, like that cloud which carried him,
- c and the *sign/mystery* of heaven, from which there shone out his splendid radiance.

What is the “fourness” inherent in the substance of stanza four? This is the point at which I suspended my analysis of the number-linked themes in *de fide* 49. Etymology seems to offer a starting-point: the word for “four” in Syriac (*arb^cō*) only needs an “m” prefix to be changed into the word for “womb” or “vulva” (*-marb^cō*). The link between the two concepts should be sought in the image of an animal crouched in a womblike hollow with its four legs and its belly pressed against the ground, ready either to pounce or flee. The word for the season of spring (*rvī^cō*) is derived from the same root, which suggests the abstract notion of a latent life-force and of imminent movement. It is striking, then, that stanza four of the first ode on the pearl contains four images of pregnancy and birth. This is obvious in the case of Mary, the Church and the Cloud; how the rainbow (“heaven’s sign”) can be seen as a “nativity”, Ephrem tells us in *de fide* 75,13-16:

Raise water to the sun: behold, an image of the Sacred One’s Nativity!

Light, splendid as its parent, brings forth fire: no flux, no section in this birth we see.

Not severed from the sun its sire, nor sprung from seed in water’s womb:
what should this mean?

When limpid rain surrenders to the sun, that “child” is born in which God’s Son is seen.

Pregnancy and birth are present also in *de fide* 49, though not explicitly so in stanza four. This, however, may be due to the overlapping wave-pattern of that ode. We saw how each stanza contained, besides its own number, arithmetical “seeds” of the two following stanzas. Look for pregnancy and birth in stanzas two and three, and you will find them: “the new-born race”, “in waters whirled”, “his birth”. Though stanza four does not itself refer to pregnancy and birth, everything in it refers to baptism; and the baptismal font is a ritual womb (cf. John 3,4-5). Stanza five is explicit again:

Just as the Ark’s womblike recesses were emptied, so the types which are in the books have also become redundant.

This, I think, must be an elucidation of stanza four, which is full of types. (In the same way, stanza four elucidates the symbolism of stanza three and stanza six refers back to the previous stanza with its opening phrase: "My mind meanders.") The passage quoted from stanza five gives us a link between pregnancy and birth, on the one hand, and typology, on the other. Types are a kind of pregnancy; the reality they foreshadow is their birth.

Stanza four of *de fide* 81 is the first stanza with an historical dimension in that ode. If stanza three adds the third dimension by bringing in the body, the time-bound aspect of pregnancy and birth, whether biological or typological, may be seen as a fourth dimension. Time, early Christians agreed, was created on the "fourth day", when God made the luminaries and, with them, the means to mark and measure the seasons (Gen. 1,14). For Ephrem, history is important, because God worked through the life of the Jewish people to prepare the way for His Anointed. History, under this religious aspect, is almost synonymous with the sum of all the human types. It makes sense to cluster it with typology and the concepts of pregnancy and birth.

The four images in this stanza comprise two "types", that of the pregnant cloud and that of the rainbow child, and two "realities", Mary with child and the Real Presence of Christ through the Eucharist in the communal Body of the Christian Church. Mary's pregnancy is weighed against the type of the Nativity and, in the pivotal bar, Christ's manifestation in the Church counterbalances the hidden Presence in the Shekinah. The structure is chiasmic.

v. Stanza five

- a I saw in *it/her* his emblems, both of his triumphant achievements and of his crownings.
- b I saw his succour with his profit, both of his hidden things and of his revealed things.
- c *It/she* became of *itself/herself* greater than the ark in which I *roamed/strayed*.

It is uncertain whether Ephrem meant to build up, stanza by stanza, a picture of the action of weighing the pearl in a hand-held balance. If so, the first two stanzas would give the scales, the third the pivotal bar and the fourth the fulcrum, another concept which can be related to pregnancy; as to the fifth, it should produce the hand of the weigher himself. Certainly the "poetic self" of the closing *terzain* of stanza five introduces a new tone into the

ode; here, for the first time, he speaks directly to the reader through the persona of a poet, as opposed to that of a communicant and thus of a figurative merchant of pearls: "Such greatness I found not when in the Ark I roamed!"

We have already had cause to be grateful to Ephrem for giving us this hint to compare *de fide* 81 with *de fide* 49. The mystery of the number five seems to be associated with the motif of "roaming", which Ephrem uses in *de fide* 81,5 to characterize his art. He does so again in the opening *terzain* of *de fide* 49,6, which seems, as I have said, to be a comment on what goes before, in stanza five. Here again, we find explicit evocations of the crucial theme in the two foregoing stanzas and in the beginning of the following stanza, but not in stanza five itself. Stanza five does, however, contain the phrase "bear witness to one another"; and if Ephrem's "roaming" describes his method of associative thought, then it may be envisaged as a line linking up disparate points which the poet sees in relation one to another. Significant connections dominate this stanza: the Ark is linked to the Torah, the Torah to the types, the types to Christ, Christ to the Church and, coming full circle, the Church to the Ark. That makes a total of five connections, linking up five points and ending at the first. If, instead of a pentagon, we draw a five-pointed star, or "pentangle", we can do justice to the idea of "roaming" or "meandering", as well. I shall come back to this in the following section.

It is striking that the idea of coronation, germane to the theme of majesty, is introduced at this point, and not earlier. As we shall see in section 4, the number five conjures up in Ephrem's mind a circular figure, the pentagon or the pentangle, or both. Crowning will be the image with which the five-ode cycle closes. It may be partly because the cycle is epitomized in this image that Ephrem places it in his "stanzaic balance" opposite his evocation of his own art. As Christ was crowned for his labours on the Cross, so the poet forges a diadem by his effort of creation. Both are marked by the number five: the poet, because he labours as a thinker, using the "five wits" or senses, and, figuratively, as a craftsman, relying on the skill of his five-fingered hands, and Christ, because of the five wounds in his body.

Like a mute lamb's, thy nature is a gentle one.
When captured, pierced and pinned upon
the skull (oh, bold comparison!),
the better thus it is displayed to everyone.

The Beauty of the Crucified is traced in thee;
 wounds like His own thy body shows:
 His Hands were drilled with steel, like thee;
 He died to reign, as by thy pain thy beauty grows.
 (*de fide* 82,11-12)

The question remains, why, if Ephrem was referring only to the Crucifixion in stanza five, did he use plurals: "his emblems", "his brave deeds", "his crownings"? This riddle is, I believe, a challenge to the reader to emulate the poet's art—another reason for placing this *terzain* in the balance opposite the "roaming" of Ephrem in the Ark. Assuming, in accordance with the number of the stanza, that there should be five "emblems" corresponding to as many aspects of the pearl's appearance, which stand for five "struggles" and five "crownings", I am inclined to fill in the resulting "grid" as follows:

Aspects of the pearl's appearance:

round, rainbow-coloured, white, pierced, displayed.

Corresponding emblems of Christ:

His Head, Noah's sign, the "pillar of cloud", His Wounds, the Imperial Crown.

Corresponding struggles and triumphs:

the Nativity, the Flood, the Exodus (Exod. 13-15), the Crucifixion, the Persecutions.

Corresponding crownings:

the "crowning" of the Christ-child's head as it emerged from the birth-canal;

the crowning of the ascended Christ on the rainbow-throne (Heb. 2,9; cf. Rev. 4,3);

the crowning of the Son of Man, riding on the clouds (Dan. 7,14);
 the mock-coronation of Jesus with the Crown of Thorns (Mark 15,17);

the "coronation" of the Faith through its adoption by the Roman emperors.¹⁸

If it be objected that the crownings upset the historical order, in defence it may be said that the two "misplaced crownings" (numbers two and three) take place in the context of eternity, and may therefore be depicted in any episode of history. My intention here is not to exclude any other crownings, nor to claim that Ephrem was intending us to find each of the patterns I have

¹⁸ This occurred in Ephrem's lifetime; on the connection, at the ideological level, between "brave deeds" and "crowning" see, for example, M. McCormick, *Eternal Victory: Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium and the Medieval West* (Cambridge - Paris 1986) and F. Heim, *La Théologie de la victoire de Constantin à Théodose* (Paris 1992).

delineated. I believe he saw rich possibilities in the challenge and left it open.

The pivotal quatrain of stanza five expresses in a brief compass the "balancing act" which Ephrem's art involves; indeed, it is central to his idea of the poetic vocation, as witness the following passage:

I took my stand halfway
between awe and love;
a yearning for Paradise
invited me to explore it,
but awe at its majesty
refrained me from my search.
With wisdom, however,
I reconciled the two;
I revered what lay hidden
and meditated on what was revealed.
The aim of my search was to gain profit,
the aim of my silence was to find succour.
(*de paradiso* 1,2; tr. Brock)

Here are clustered the matching antitheses of the hidden and the revealed, of profit and of succour, exactly as in the quatrain of our stanza. Furthermore, the juxtaposition of the poet's "search" with the "wisdom" by which he "reconciles" these tensions mirrors the image of Ephrem "roaming in the Ark". It was the wise, reconciled personality of Noah himself who roamed in the "drifting" Ark. The poet did so, too, insofar as he identified himself with Noah.

To understand better the tension inherent in the number five and the way it can be "reconciled", we must look at the way Ephrem divides this number into three and two, then into two and three. He does this by grouping the first three odes in the cycle around one chorus and the last two around another; and by reversing the pattern in the construction of his coda, which begins with a pair and ends with a trio. If we look for the common ground between these patterns in the contents of the choruses and of the coda, we find on the side of the number three the pearl, the Kingdom and Christ, and on the side of the number two that other "stone", Cephas (as Jesus named his disciple Simon) and his apostolic faith. The fact that Cephas is singled out is not due only to his name, which makes him a "counterweight" for the pearl; it also has to do with his character, which was as contradictory as any man's (he swore to stick by Jesus to the end, yet he denied Him thrice). But like the division we observed in stanza two, which opened up a vista on reunification at infinity

through multiplication, Peter's impetuosity (he was always first out of the fishing-boat, when the disciples saw Jesus walking on the water or beckoning from the shore) was a symptom of the love by which he would be perfected as a martyr and as head of the Church.

Two is a transitional number between the singleness of one and the integration of three. The number five can express both the tension between man's dividedness and God's perfection, and the dynamic which love can generate from that tension. This dynamic is expressed most eloquently by Ephrem himself when he writes, three stanzas from the end of the cycle: "and as thou art in all time one, let me become one through thee."

As Peter the apostle was given the keys to the Kingdom, Ephrem the mystic unlocks the riddles of the world of sense-perception. In this way the five senses are germane to his art, as are the five fingers, which can stand for the power of the poet, or "maker" (Greek: ποιητής). Ephrem the craftsman fashions a counterfeit world, through which an inkling of his mystic experience can be communicated to others.

What the poet says and suggests about his work may be summarized as follows: his art integrates what is separate and contradictory in a surprising way, by an impetuous flitting movement, reminiscent of a bird; in doing so, it imitates the dynamic of re-integration between man and God. These concepts, like those of sensibility and of poetry, are clustered around the number five. It should be remembered, moreover, that the fishes and the birds were created on the "fifth day": birds and fishes typically "roam" and so resemble the associative mind of the poet. They can also "stray" into the clutches of their hunters, as arrogant theorists lay themselves open to Satan (see *de fide* 20,5; this whole ode is quoted in section 4 of this article); for Satan is the sly serpent and the serpent is one of the reptiles which were created with the fishes on the fifth day (cf. *de natiuitate* 26,8).

vi. Stanza six

- a I saw in *it/her* stores without shadows, for *it/she* is the daughter of the bright one,
- b eloquent types, without tongues, a language of *signs/mysteries*, without lips,
- c a lyre of silence, which, without a *voice/sound*, produced *melodies/songs*.

From the five senses it is natural to move on to the sixth sense; and that is what Ephrem does in stanza six. It is no accident that the Syriac word for wisdom is formed from the root used to describe carnal knowledge. This stanza expresses the conviction that the knowledge of God transcends language as utterly as communion with God transcends sexual intercourse; and that the language which is used to express that knowledge is divinely inspired. On the "sixth day" man was created in God's image and received the commandment to "be fruitful and multiply". Ephrem obeys this commandment exclusively on a spiritual level.

In mathematics, the number six, like the number twenty-eight, is a perfect number. This means that it is the sum of its divisors, one, two and three. Ephrem, too, calls it perfect and goes on to say it is "the sum of sums" (*de natiuitate* 27,3-4). McVey, in her commentary on this passage (*Ephrem*, 211), points out that six sixes make thirty-six, which is the sum of the numbers one to eight. Whatever the nature of its perfection, it was felt to be part of the Divine Plan. Jesus was born (Ephrem's Church remembered) on 6 January; he died on a Friday, the sixth day of the week. The Creation, too, was completed in six "days". Six, like ten, completes a recognized series. Other numbers can play this role: for example, eight completes the octave. But Ephrem singles out the numbers six and ten in the following passage:

Just as enumeration
has only ten levels,
there are six sides to creation:
the height and depth and four directions filled by You.
(*de natiuitate* 27,12; tr. McVey)

This puts a new complexion on the six-stanza ode about Noah. The Ark's criss-cross course (*de fide* 49,3-4) accounts for the four points of the compass, so stanzas five and six should stand for the remaining "sides", height and depth. I suggest this contrast is reflected not only in the movement of the waves (cf. Ps. 107,26), but also in the opposition of the swimming poet to the sailing Noah in stanza six: the profundity of questing thought (five) is complementary to the summit of collected wisdom (six).

The comparison of the pearl with the Ark in stanza five enables us to visualise more clearly, what stanza four has already suggested, that the body of the pearl can be seen as the "mother" of its own symbolic meaning, Christ. (As the pearl says in stanza ten, she harbours a "treasure of mysteries" within her "womb".) The word "stores", at the beginning of stanza six, suggests capacious-

ness. The pearl is a store of light. Like the sun, its mythical “father”, it seems to be filled with light all through, in contrast to the shadowy storerooms of the Ark. Perhaps it is for this reason that the pearl is a symbol of enlightenment and wisdom. By using the word here translated “stores”, Ephrem evokes those rare passages from Scripture, and from his own works, in which this word is used. Most of these combine the word with “hidden things” and with “wisdom”. For example, Job 11,6 (Peshitta): “And if he were to show you the hidden things of wisdom—for wisdom has deep stores—you would realise that God forgives your sins.” Not only this, but also the association with the Ark show that wisdom is on the agenda of stanza six; for the sixth and last stanza of the ode on Noah and the Ark was about the archetypal wisdom exhibited by both of these.

How can the merchant know that his pearl is light all through, unless he has pierced it? How can the lover “know” his beloved without penetrating her, as the piercing eye of Ephrem’s spirit penetrates the depths of the mystery which confronts him in this ode? That the number six was associated, in Ephrem’s mind, with sexual as well as with spiritual penetration is suggested by one of a group of three odes on the sun, *de fide* 75. The “tailpiece” of that ode is composed in six stanzas, in which the five “pure” sense-organs are contrasted with the sixth. The poet warns against using the sixth sense with greed and arrogance, thus imitating the “rape” of Creation by the bestial spirits of the demons:

Thy human sense-perception is too weak to probe the Godhead:
 shun
 licentiousness!
 Of spirit made and subtle though the angels are, their senses still
 do not suffice.
 Refrain, therefore, from probing with the organs of coarse flesh,
 from which
 excretions ooze!
 Let these alone, for sense is pure, and tell us of pollution by
 polluted fiends!
 The organs of thy sense tell us how demons use their organs, too,
 in Satan’s way.
 Does Legion not have snouts to root and hooves with which to
 ravish all
 Creation’s parts?

In the light of this frankly phallic imagery, we need not hesitate in characterizing the “insight” of the opening *terzain* in *de fide* 81,6 as an allusion to the male role in sexual intercourse, especially since the pearl is personified explicitly for the first time in

this stanza, as “the daughter of the bright one”. It is balanced by the female sexuality implicit in the closing *terzain*. Compare *de natiuitate* 15,1 and 4-6:

- 1 In Thee is my beginning and, I trust, my end.
I open my mouth: fill it now!
The furrow I, the Farmer Thou!
Sow here Thy Voice, Thy Seed to me, Thy Mother, lend! [...]
- 4 (She saw the Wise Men's gifts and sang with greater glee.)
Thine audience, Lord, is gathered round.
Their tribute lies upon the ground.
The lyre of His own Songs my Child has made of me!
- 5 The lyre looks to its master: my mouth looks to Thee.
Consent to arouse Thy Mother's tongue!
Let me conceive an unknown song!
Let my mouth sing praise unconceived, as I bore Thee!
- 6 Hard things are light, not hard, for Thee, as Thou hast shown:
conception in a womb unknown,
fruit from a field of flesh unsown;
so mouth begets and multiplies thy Praise full-blown!

Stanza one, in combination with the beginning of stanza five, even suggests that the form of the lyre resembles a section through the womb, with the vulva pointing upwards, towards the player's face. Yet in stanza six both male and female sexuality seem subsumed and sublimated in the mouth of the “poetess”, which “begets and multiplies” God's praises.

In *de fide* 81,6, the balancing principle applies once more between the opening and closing sections. Both male and female sexuality are transposed to the spiritual level; but, although sexuality itself seems to be placed on a par with the “shadows” which are banished by full enlightenment, the spiritual tropes of male and female sexuality hold each other in equipoise. Mary is the model for every believer, who should know when to “yield” (*de fide* 81,12) to God's “masculine” strength; and it is this “feminine” attitude of “listening” which the poet adopts in the second half of the ode. Indeed, the “female” pearl seems to enjoy turning the tables on him: the naked divers who fish for her, she says, have no staying power. So the poet, even as “possessor”, is defeated by the “feminine” mystery of God. On the other hand, it would be a mistake to say that Ephrem chooses the “female” attitude of humility and rejects the “male” thrust of the intellect altogether. The secret of wisdom, he would say, lies in maintaining a balance between them. “There is intellectual enquiry in the Church, investi-

gating what is revealed; but the intellect was not intended to pry into hidden things" (*de fide* 8,9; tr. Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 13).

The "types" of the pearl, though "without tongues", are eloquent; her "signs", or "mysteries", though "without lips", are a language. The quatrain, while it is balanced in itself, also participates in the build-up from "without shadows" in the opening tercain to "without a voice" in the closing tercain. If shadows stand for ignorance, or worse, then the anaphora suggests negative connotations for the "tongues" and "lips", which are not only sexual attributes, but also parts of the body associated by Scripture with wilfulness. Sex, perhaps, was rejected by Ephrem, insofar as it was, for him, an expression of wilfulness, a stubborn refusal to "go the whole way" with the Holy Spirit.

Stanza six of *de fide* 86 is apposite here. This ode and *de fide* 87, the last in the collection, read at times like a commentary on the cycle on the pearl. Almost certainly they were composed when *On the Faith* was collected to complete the total of eight poems in the eighth (and sole incomplete) decimal sequence of the collection:

Lord of the Truth, whose Shadows are His Servants true.
For wheresoe'er His Will did bend,
His saints did make their wills intend.
Their shadows were illumined by the Bright One's Glow!

The "voice" which is made redundant in the closing tercain of *de fide* 81,6 must, to be congruent, be that of the individual who is reluctant to align his will entirely with that of God. Mary gave up that "voice", when she declared herself God's handmaiden. As a result, she became fruitful and multiplied, both by giving birth to the Word incarnate, and by becoming an inspired singer through the composition of the Magnificat. To sing, by God's inspiration, without the interference of one's own wilfulness, "words of wisdom" in praise of God is, in Ephrem's view (*de paradiso* 8,8) the purpose for which the resonant human frame was made, and for which its sinews were tautened. The Church in Edessa attested to Ephrem's success in realising this destiny by commemorating him, on June 9th, as "Lord Ephrem of the words of wisdom (*d-hekhmōtheh*)" (source: the *Chronicle of Edessa*).

The merchant who weighed his pearl in stanzas one to four, and who journeyed with it to find the King in stanza five, must pierce it before it can be mounted on the Crown. But the act of piercing is like a rape. Merchants have a bad name, on the whole, in Holy Scripture. No city had so many of them as Tyre (Ezek.

27). But Tyre's great sin was that of arrogance and for that God made Ezechiel utter the following threat against that city:

I will cause the multitude of thy songs to cease;
and the voice of thy lyre shall be no more heard.
(Ezek. 26,13; Peshitta, assimilated to AV)

In this passage we find the "silent lyre", the silenced "voice", and the "songs" of *de fide* 81,6. By a literary allusion, Ephrem prepares his reader for the trump and thunder of stanza seven. Stanza six already contains an implicit rebuke to the poet for his presumption in speaking as if he could claim the insights of his penetrating intellect as his own.

The music of the ode has entered a transitional phase. The opening "allegro" has culminated in a moment of highly-charged suspense. The trumpet-blast of stanza seven will release this charge, allowing the "first movement" to end, with stanza eight, on a note of serenity and completeness, yet with a hint of sombre and weighty things to come. The "second movement" will begin with the slow syllables of stanza nine, a prelude to the awe-inspiring "adagio cantabile" of stanzas ten to thirteen. The final movement will be performed, "agitato", by the mumbling, darting ensemble of the fishes.

The act of love is exhausting. Ephrem has made us work hard to elicit the connections between the numbers of his stanzas and the concepts clustered under them. Before the atmosphere becomes too oppressive, he offers the blessed release of a veritable cloudburst: the seven sevens of stanza seven.

vii. Stanza seven

- a The trumpet *uttered/pronounced* and the thunder *muttered/whispered*:
Thou shalt not presume!
- b Leave the veiled things! Take the revealed things! Do you see in the
cloudless sky another rain?
- c The irrigation-channel of my ears, as from a cloud, filled up with
sermons/interpretations.

What, then, are these "seven sevens"? Without imagining that the list is exhaustive (someone better read in Holy Scripture might compile it differently) I offer the following:

- 1 The seven trumpets of Jericho (Josh. 6,4-5), the walls of which crumbled (like those of Tyre).
- 2 The seven angels of Doomsday, with their seven corpse-awakening trumpets (Rev. 18,1-2; 1 Cor. 15,52).
- 3 The seventh day, on which God rested from His Labours (Gen. 2,2),

reflected, perhaps, in the seventh month, in which the Ark came to rest on Mt Ararat (Gen. 8,4).

- 4 The Sabbath, on which both this seventh day, and that of the covenant of Sinai, made amid the din of trumpets and thunder, were remembered (Exod. 19,16; 20,18; 24,16; 34,21).
- 5 The seven branches of the Menorah, one of the emblems of the sanctuary, where none but the priest may go (Exod. 25,31 ff.).
- 6 The seven of patient persistence (e.g. 1 Kgs. 18,43).
- 7 The "seventy times seven" of forgiveness (Matt. 18,21 ff.).

The thunder can actually be "heard" in the Syriac *lō lam tamrah*, which has the same form as the Ten Commandments: "Thou shalt not presume!" This is not a new commandment (cf. Deut. 17,12-13), but the other side of the commandment to love God, in which the Law is summed up (Matt. 22,36 ff.). In six intuitive stanzas, comparable to the six days of the Creation, Ephrem has explored the object of his love. All this time, like the Ark "drifting on the deluge", he has "roamed" on the seas of creative association. Now, at the summit of this spiritual act of love, he comes to rest in the knowledge that the heart of God's Mystery is holy and inviolable. To attempt its violation would be an action incompatible with love.

Elijah, too, was on the top of a mountain (Carmel) when he said to his servant:

"Go up now, look toward the sea." And he went up, and looked, and said, "There is nothing." And he said, "Go again seven times." And it came to pass at the seventh time, that he said, "Behold there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand ... And it came to pass in the mean while, that the heaven was black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain. (1 Kgs. 18,43 ff.; AV)

Ephrem was surely thinking of this passage, which helps to effect the transition from the brightness of the first half to the subaqueous gloom of the second half of the ode. That is why he makes the thunder ask the poet: "Can you see another rain in the clear sky?" This "clear sky" is the unclouded light of the pearl itself. Yet that pearl is a dew-drop by origin, according to the myth; a miniature white cloud, no bigger than the palm of the poet's hand, for that is where it lies. And the dew was the "former rain" with which Israel was blessed. This little cloud of "shadowless" white suggests, by opposition, a great expanse of black: the "latter rain". Hence, also, the deluge; and the sea, out of which the "little cloud", which is the pearl, emerged in the first place.

The threat of judgement conveyed by the opening *terzain* is balanced by the metaphor of irrigation in the closing *terzain*.

This juxtaposition implies forgiveness. It is reminiscent of "God moves in a mysterious way", by W. Cowper:

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take!
The clouds ye so much dread
Are filled with mercy and shall break
In blessings on your head.

The Bible associates rain with God's mercy. For example, Hosea, chapter 6, begins as follows:

And they shall say: "Come, and let us return unto the Lord; for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up. After two days will he revive us; in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight. Then we shall know how to go towards the knowledge of the Lord, like the early morning, which his going forth hath prepared; and he shall come unto us as the rain and as the springtime which intoxicates the land."
(Peshitta, assimilated to AV)

The "rain" of the quatrain evokes this passage; and this in turn creates an expectation of the theme of resurrection, which belongs to the number eight.

Jesus liked to cite Hosea 6,6 against the Pharisees, as he does in Matt. 12, where his disciples are rebuked for plucking ears of corn on the Sabbath. Part of Jesus's reply is to say "the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath day". But he begins by saying:

Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungred, and they that were with him; how he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shewbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests?
(AV)

The boldness of David, the Psalmist, is reminiscent of the boldness of the poet Ephrem. "Eating the shewbread" is a good metaphor for the consummation intimated by stanza six. Like the stones of Matt. 4,3, this precious "stone", the pearl, has become bread to the visionary's hungry eye. Stanza eight will confirm the association between the pearl and the "bread of heaven". If Ephrem has been presumptuous, his offence will be forgiven, because his "hunger" was a symptom of his love.

For my part, I have loved, and so have learned.
(*de paradiso* 6,25; tr. Brock)

David, too, escaped punishment, unlike Uzziah (2 Chr. 26), the king who entered the sanctuary in the insensitivity of his overweening pride.

Ephrem is anything but insensitive. His "presumption" is no

more than the natural expression of that feeling of personal discovery which comes to anyone granted an insight. He may, like David, have penetrated an earthly sanctuary; but, unlike the Arian theologians, he leaves the ultimate sanctum untouched. He comes face to face with its veil at the end of stanza six, because the formula given there, though it can apply to the Nativity, reminds him that the Origin of Christ is shrouded in impenetrable mystery:

Sacred is Thy Birth, a silent mystery,
too deep for man to sound.
(*de fide* 10,2)

The main fault of the Arians, in Ephrem's eyes, was to presume to investigate this concept, which is beyond human experience: John 1,1 reveals all that can be known. Henceforth, Ephrem will listen, not speak. But first, he must acknowledge that the insights he had claimed for his own have in fact been a free gift from God, like the bread which the Hebrews received from heaven while they wandered in the wilderness.

viii. Stanza eight

- a But like that manna, which filled the people on its own,
- b in the place of meats with *its/her* sweets, the pearl has filled me as well,
- c in the place of the scriptures and the readings from them and the commentaries on them.

In commenting on earlier stanzas, I found that Ephrem assumes a knowledge of Scripture. Stanza three, for instance, should be seen against the background of those Gospel passages which seem to depict Jesus as less than perfect; and stanzas six and seven allude to contexts in the Old Testament which enrich our understanding of this extremely compact ode. In stanza eight, a knowledge of the Book of Exodus is essential. The reader who does not know that the Hebrews had two meals a day, one of manna in the morning and one of quail-flesh at dusk, might be deceived by the language of this stanza and think that the poet was expressing complete satisfaction with his harvest of symbols gleaned from the pearl and that he rejected Scripture as superfluous. Had Ephrem been saying this, however, he should have avoided using a scriptural example to illustrate his point. This anomaly alerts us to the subtle allusion, which shows that the natural symbol, though apparently sufficient on its own, in fact needs to be sup-

plemented by Scripture; and, indeed, that Scripture comes first, just as dusk precedes dawn in the order of the Hebrew day.

The development of this ode, as I have said, resembles the organic cycle, except for one thing: the sexual act, which is the climax and the new beginning of animal life, is replaced by a spiritual act of love, followed, with the abruptness of death, by divine judgement, mingled with mercy. The climax and the new beginning of the spiritual cycle is not the intimate knowledge of God which can take the place, in a human life, of carnal knowledge, but the "new dawn" of the Resurrection. In one sense this is the end, not a beginning. But its anticipation in the constant celebration of the Sacraments, by which the promise of eternal life is renewed, resembles the repeated completion of an octave on an ever-rising scale. The octave of the first half of the ode is complete; in verse nine a second octave will begin. I shall now give, after a list of possible scriptural references, a poetic rendering of the whole ode.

Possible scriptural references for *de fide* 81:

Refrain: Matt. 13,45-6.

Stanza 1: Ps. 22,22; Heb. 2,12; Matt. 13,38; 2 Sam. 7,13 ff.; Dan. 2,44; 7,27; Luke 1,32-3; John 4,14; 6,54-5; Ps. 42,1; Exod. 17,6.

Stanza 2: Ps. 105,4; 139,17-18; John 1,5; Matt. 17,2.

Stanza 3: Matt. 18,3,10; John 12,27; 13,21; 14,27; Mark 1,9; 14,36.

Stanza 4: Matt. 1,18-25; Luke 1,34-5; 2,22; Lev. 12,2 ff.; Col. 1,18; 1 Cor. 12,12 ff.; Ex. 40,34-5; 2 Chr. 5,13-14; Heb. 12,1; Isa. 19,1; Ps. 104,3; Dan. 7,13; Luke 21,27; Rev. 14,14; Gen. 9,12 ff.

Stanza 5: Cant. 6,10; Isa. 11,10; 1 Cor. 15,54 ff.; Exod. 13,21; 14,19-20; Mark 15,17; Heb. 2,9; Dan. 7,14.

Stanza 6: Job 11,6 (Peshitta); 28,18; Isa. 11,9; 9,2; Amos 5,8; Luke 1,35.78-9; Jas. 3,8; Ps. 12,4; Isa. 6,5; Luke 1,38.46 ff.; Ezek. 26,13.

Stanza 7: Josh. 6,4-5; Rev. 8,1-2; Gen. 2,2; 2 Kgs. 11,14; Exod. 19,16; 20,18; Deut. 17,13; Num. 10,1 ff.; 1 Cor. 15,52; Ps. 18,13-14; 104,7; 1 Kgs. 18,41 ff.; Deut. 11,14; Hos. 6,3; Isa. 35,7.

Stanza 8: Exod. 16,12 ff.; 1 Kgs. 17,1 ff.

Stanza 10: Job 38,8 ff.; Prov. 8,24; Ps. 104,9; 95,5; Mark 4,41.

Stanza 12: Ps. 88,7; 89,9; Jonah 1,4.13; 2,3.

Stanza 13: Exod. 14,5 ff.; Num. 21,4 ff.; Gen. 19,1 ff.

Stanza 14: Job 12,8; Hab. 1,14; Matt. 13,47 ff.; 1 Sam. 6,6; Neh. 9,11; Job 41,24; Ps. 51,10; 95,8 ff.; Ezek. 11,19.

Stanza 15: Jonah 1,9; 2,9; 4,1 ff.

Stanza 16: Jonah 1,17; Matt. 12,40; John 3,4-5; Rom. 6,4; Ps. 104,25 ff.; Jonah 1,3; Ps. 139,7 ff.; 1 Peter 3,20 ff.

The First of the Five Odes on the Pearl (*de fide* 81)

- 1 My brothers, one bright dawn I claimed a queenly pearl.
Sons of the Realm, her majesty
portrayed in types her Lord to me,
as, drinking from her source, I watched the Son's Signs swirl.
- Chorus: Our Lord evoked the Kingdom through the high-born pearl.
- 2 On open palm I weighed her with devouring eyes.
One face was all that I had sought:
her myriad masks defied my thought.
The facets of the Bright One's Child defeat the wise.
- 3 Her clarity was proof of His untroubledness;
her purity to me did mean
the Body of our Lord is clean;
the Truth uncleft I saw in her unclovenness.
- 4 Mary I found in her with her pure embryo;
I found the Church, great with the Son;
the Cloud which bore the Holy One;
and Heaven's sign, from which there shone His splendid Glow.
- 5 Of His brave Deeds and Crownings she the emblems owned.
In aspects shown, by facets veiled,
His Gain, His Grace I there beheld;
such greatness I found not, when in the Ark I roamed!
- 6 Shadowless stores I found within the bright one's child;
fair-spoken types I saw, no tongues;
no lips, but signs, my sense beguiled;
no voice, yet still that silent lyre gave birth to songs.
- 7 Such boldness (trump and thunder warn) is not allowed!
Accept the shown and leave the veiled!
Look up! Clear skies fresh rain shall yield!
(Now sermons flood my listening duct, as from a cloud.)
- 8 Manna sufficed the Hebrews for their morning meal.
So with her sweets, instead of meats,
the pearl, likewise, has filled mine eyes,
instead of what the Scriptures and the clerks reveal.
- 9 Were I to ask what secrets new she could impart,
she would not hear what I desired;
she has no mouth to speak her heart!
Insensate pearl, whose senses new I have acquired!
- 10 (She answers me!) My father is the boundless sea;
and yet the wealth within my womb
outgrows the sea's uncharted room;
and wouldst thou strip great Ocean's Lord of mystery?

- 11 Stripped men I see immerse themselves in search of me!
 Their pounding hearts brook no delay:
 in Ocean's womb they barely stay!
 And wouldst thou search the Womb of God's Eternity?
- 12 The Son's a sea with waves that sink as well as save;
 hast thou not seen the swollen main
 shatter the ship that vies in vain?
 Yet her that yields the waters raise beyond the grave.
- 13 The sea engulfed the Egyptians, though they had not pried;
 on land, though not inquisitive,
 the Hebrews bled: and shall ye live?
 Sodom was licked by fire: and what if ye were tried?
- 14 (Fish, at such grim tales, shudder in the sea near us!)
 What! Is your heart then made of jet,
 that ye read these and these forget?
 The Judge has long been silent: that is ominous!
- 15 With arrogance of intellect your thanks contend;
 ye honour God, and yet ye doubt:
 which is sincere? For truth will out!
 Ye pray, ye pry: to which of these should we attend?
- 16 For three days we had Jonah for our neighbour here:
 shuddering shook great Ocean's brood,
 for Jonah fled, while God pursued!
 Who shall escape? Impetuous men, learn holy fear!

Number has proved one of the principles governing the composition of certain of Ephrem's odes. This was shown by *de fide* 49, on Noah, and by the first ode on the pearl, *de fide* 81, which exhibited a correspondence between the theme of each stanza and its serial number. Moreover, the reader who approaches these odes with number-symbolism in mind will find fruitful avenues of meditation in them, which might otherwise have remained undiscovered. For example, after stanza 10 *de fide* 81 builds up a new series; for as Ephrem says in *de natiuitate* 26,12 (tr. McVey): "whenever counting goes up to ten, it goes back to begin from one again." In 11 divers attempt to grasp the pearl, who speaks, significantly, in the first person singular. "One" (*ḥadh*) resembles the verb "he has taken hold of" (*ḥhadh*), which is equally appropriate to stanza one and stanza eleven, though here the poet is projected in the diver, while there he played the complementary role of merchant. In 12 we see two aspects of the Son's strength, helpful and harmful; in 13 three examples of divine punishment. In 14 the fish are an image of pregnancy and birth, as Ephrem says in *de fide* 20,5;¹⁹ in 15

¹⁹ Their fear about the "long silence of Justice" introduces not only the con-

we find a warning against “prying”, which is the “divided” aspect of the poet’s own art of “questing”; in 16 a hint of fruitfulness and of wisdom, insofar as the tenor of the stanza evokes Ps. 111,10: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of all wisdom.” At the same time, there is in 16 an unmistakable reference to the Resurrection (cf. Matt. 12,40), by virtue of its being the completion of both a series of six and a series of eight.

Even in odes where the arithmetical series does not apparently dominate the composition throughout, a subtle allusion to the serial symbolism we have elicited may prepare the reader for a significant point. Take *de fide* 82,1-5: one is for the pearl and the Redeemer; two is for the oyster and Mary, divided, yet united; three is for the Incarnate Christ; four is for metaphor (the “veiled womb”) and virginal pregnancy; and five is for the crown. Another example is *de fide* 83, translated below, in section 4, part b. We seem to find “integrity” in stanza one of that ode (the pearl, though stripped, is not ashamed) and “division and reunification” in stanza two (Eve lost her “sheen”, comparable to the “splendid robe” of stanza 17 in the ballad of St Thomas, but her daughters will be clothed with it again in Paradise). Stanza three, like *de fide* 81,3, has to do with the Incarnation, stanza four, like *de fide* 49,4, with typology and baptism. Like *de fide* 81,5, stanza five introduces the emblem of the crown, while the “teaching” of the Ethiopian eunuch may stand for the poet’s art (the celibate Ephrem’s odes were instruments of heuristic teaching, by which, moreover, he taught women as well as men). The reader who picks up these subtle allusions will not be surprised to read in stanza six about the transference of the “Lamp” from Solomon to the Queen of Sheba, because he or she is expecting the theme of wisdom, the sublime metamorphosis of sexual intercourse. But Ephrem wants his reader to be alive to the apparent identification of the lamp of kingship (2 Sam. 21,17; 1 Kgs. 11,36) with inner enlightenment and to think out its implications.

It is in the nature of heuristic teaching, that room is left for the imagination of the pupil. Although the question of Ephrem’s intention is not irrelevant, it would be a mistake to assume that this

cept of time, but in particular, for the original audience, the history of their city. Edessa had twice been destroyed by flood, for the second time in 303, about the date of Ephrem’s birth; less than ten years after his death it was observed (source: the *Peregrinatio Egeriae*) that the channel which diverted the flood-waters was dry in April, which probably means it was silted up. As far as Ephrem’s contemporaries could tell, the next flood, which in fact occurred in 413 (source: the *Chronicle of Edessa*), might have happened at any time.

intention was restrictive. One of the advantages of treating numbers as significant is that Scripture is full of them. This gives the poet great scope for implicit allusions, which cannot, in the nature of things, be pinned down with full objectivity. The thing to remember is that Ephrem's poetry is an exercise in multiplication, and that part of that exercise is to stimulate the same fruitfulness in the reader.

All that I have said probably only scratches the surface; and I have not even attempted to find out what the literary sources of Ephrem's number-symbolism may have been.²⁰ But one thing should be said, before this section ends: the whole cycle on the pearl has a numerical structure, in which the "divine numbers" 1 and 3 and 6 and 8 are consistently combined in various ways with the "human numbers" 2 and 5:

Ode 1: $(3 + 3 + 2) + (1 + 2 + 2 + 3)$ or $8 + 8$	= 16.
Ode 2: $8 + 5$ or $5 + 8$	= 13.
Ode 3: $(2 + 3 + 2) + (3 + 2 + 3)$ or $(2 \times 3) + (3 \times 3)$ or $6 + 9$	= 15.
Ode 4: $3 + 3 + 3 + 3 + 3$ or 3×5	= 15.
Ode 5: $5 + 3 + 5$ or $3 + 2 + 3 + 2 + 3$ or $8 + 5$	= 13.

The criteria for these divisions are either sense-units, or number-sequences terminating at a particular stanza. A major caesura marks the mid-point of the whole cycle after the thirty-sixth stanza. The combination of the human and the divine numbers is an icon of the poet's quest, which is that of every believer: the quest for Christ, in whom the contradictions of human nature are resolved.

Each stanza of the cycle on the pearl contains forty syllables, a pentagon of eights or an octagon of fives, though it falls into ten units of four syllables each. Would it be fanciful to suggest that this is significant, too? The marriage of five and eight could express the sacramental aspect of the poet's art. The total of forty suggests the forty years during which the Hebrews "roamed" the

²⁰ McVey, *Ephrem*, 211 n. 595, notes the total lack of studies on this subject, which, however, could probably only be well-based if we had sufficient witnesses to Ephrem's Syriac-speaking predecessors. One concept I use in this article without sufficient understanding is that of the "divine number". The numbers two and five, which are associated with the divided nature of human beings, are liminal numbers; they can either "grow" towards perfection, or fail to do so. Four and nine are probably neutral or ambivalent. One, three, seven, eight and ten are all, like six, associated with divinity and so participate in God's perfection, though only six is a perfect number in the mathematical sense of a number which is the sum of its divisors.

wilderness before coming to the Promised Land. As Christ was “ministered to” by angels after withstanding temptation for forty days in the desert, so the poet comes to rest in the “oasis” of his chorus, the twelve syllables of which are like the twelve springs of Elim (Exod. 15,27) and the twelve pearl-gates of the heavenly Jerusalem (Rev. 21,21).

Psalm 107 provides a model, both in content and in form, for the pattern of “roaming” and “homecoming” which we have found in Ephrem’s art. The “inhabited city” and the “longed-for haven” to which, in the main text, God leads those who call upon Him, even though they are “astray in the wilderness” or totally “at sea”, are mirrored in the recurring chorus of thanks. This psalm also contains an image which fits in well with the image of the poet as a merchant: “Those who go down to the sea in ships: and follow their trade on great waters, These men have seen the works of God: and his wonders in the deep.” (tr. *The Psalms: A New Translation for Worship* [London 1977])

4 THE QUEST

In stanza six of the ode on “noble Noah” the poet compared his art to the drifting of the Ark. This apparently haphazard movement was made to form a figure in stanza three; and stanza four pointed out that this figure “traced the Cross”. The idea may seem far-fetched, but it has a certain logic. Noah lived near Babylon, so he began his journey in the East; he ended it in the North, on the mountains of Qardu.²¹ But he cannot have sailed there in a straight line, because the storm which caused the Flood recreated the conditions of chaos which had preceded the original Creation: everything was in a whirl, so the Ark must have described one loop, at the very least. This “token” loop can be represented as taking the vessel first to the West, then to the South, before ending in the North.²² But the figure so traced is not symmetrical; to restore the balance we have to connect up the finishing-point with the starting-point in the East. This is what the Ark does at the

²¹ Ephrem’s Bible named the mountain as Qardu, not as Urartu (Ararat). Qardu was just across the Tigris from Nisibis, the birthplace of Ephrem. The landing-place of Noah’s Ark seems to have been the focus of religious attention in his native region, where the steep escarpment in the North contrasts starkly with the seemingly endless “Ocean” of plains to the South.

²² Incidentally, if this order reflects the way Saint Ephrem made the sign of the Cross on his own body, then he touched his left shoulder before his right shoulder, as the Syrian Orthodox Church still teaches its children to do, and not the right shoulder, as is the custom of the Greeks and the Slavs.

end of stanza three, not physically, but spiritually, by acting as a prophetic pointer towards the “rising sun” of Christ’s Nativity. Its “roaming”, like Ephrem’s art, bears witness to the Faith. The numerical wave-pattern of the ode has helped us to find three, four and five in the figure of the Cross; its completion gives us six, whereby the sixth point is identical with the first. We recognize a figure of the completed ode: for this, too, is fully developed at the end of its fifth stanza, but returns in a sixth to the “single soul” of stanza one, describing it in the terms of equilibrium and collect-edness appropriate to the wisdom symbolized by the number six.

a. The figure of the pentangle

There is another symmetrical figure, more complex, which is also formed by joining up five separate points with a single continuous line: the five-pointed star, or “endeles knot”, as the English used to call it. Here we shall use the shorter name of “pentangle”, compounded from the Latin “pentaculum” and the English “angle”.²³ Like the cross, this figure bears witness, for Ephrem, to the victory of Christ, not only because its five points share the number of His Wounds, but also because of its resemblance to the crown.²⁴ Since God’s Majesty is the major theme of the cycle on the pearl, it is appropriate that it should be summed up in the image of the crown. The latter part of the coda, *de fide* 85,11-13, was cited in section 2, but, for the reader’s convenience, I quote it here again:

- 11 O pearl, I’ve roamed in thee! Let me collect my mind!
From gazing let me be like thee,
collected whole in thine own place!
Eternally be unified in thee would I!
- 12 To forge the Son a crown have I collected pearls.
Take, then, this gift of tainted limbs!
Thou hast no need of this, I know;
because I need thy cleansing have I made these hymns!
- 13 The diadem is forged entire of worded pearls;
not gold, but love, it has for clasp;
the band which binds it is the Faith;
not hands, but praise, shall lift it up to God on High!

²³ See the ballad of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, lines 619-69, where the pentangle is attributed to Solomon and interpreted as signifying “trawthe”, that is, according to most commentators, integrity. The early English author of this text also composed a ballad on the quest of the pearl, but it has (literally) precious little in common with the Syriac poems on this theme.

²⁴ Compare *de fide* 84,15, quoted in section 2, part b, above.

Evidently we are supposed to envisage a gold crown studded with five pearls which represent the five "limbs", or senses, of the poet and the five odes of the cycle. The "clasp of love"²⁵ should refer to the last five stanzas (including those quoted, viz. the last three), which represent the reintegration of divided man by the love of Christ (see my commentary on *de fide* 81,5). Just before this, in stanza eight of ode five, which was quoted in section 3, part i, the imagery has come full circle, with the merchants who reach out their palms to receive the Eucharistic pearl, just as the poet does in the first stanza of the cycle.

That there is a connection, in Ephrem's mind, between the number five and this figure of the crown is clear from the fact that he rarely misses an opportunity, in *de fide* 81-87, to mention the crown in a stanza numbered five or fifteen. We have already seen this applied to *de fide* 81,5; the next example is *de fide* 82,5:

Brothers He has, yet He has none, for He is One.
O Union, with great size endowed,
whose type exists in solitude,
brothers thou hast, and sisters, too, upon the Crown!

The crown in question features an especially large and perfectly spherical pearl, the Union (*mshawhadhtō*, or "the unique one", one possible meaning of the Latin *unio*), flanked by other pearls of lesser size and perfection, its "brothers and sisters". Which of the five odes represents the Union? Apart from the fact that it is linked to the number one, the first ode is the only one with an even number of stanzas, sixteen; odes two and five have thirteen each and odes three and four have fifteen each. So ode one is also the longest. The number of its stanzas is equal to the sum of the numbers left, after ten has been subtracted from each of the others. Furthermore, sixteen is a multiple of eight, and also the sum of six and ten; this number, the serial number of the ode, and the "three days" of stanza sixteen, which echo the "one day" of stanza one, together represent one, three, six, eight and ten, all of them "divine" numbers.²⁶

Reverting to the image of the crown, we should expect the Union (ode one) to be flanked by the two pearls nearest to it in size

²⁵ Compare the inclusion of "love" with silver, gold and purple as one of the components of Solomon's chariot (Cant. 3,10), where the crown follows in the next verse.

²⁶ Perhaps four should be included, since sixteen is four squared. Only further research can show precisely how Ephrem regards the several numbers. It is intriguing, for example, that nine is omitted from the series one to ten in *de nativitate* 26.

(odes three and four), with the small pearls at the back (odes two and five). A circular model for the succession of odes in the cycle would place the small pearls next to the Union and the medium-sized pearls at the back of the crown. The desired result can only be achieved by linking the cycle together with the continuous line of the pentangle. This, then, must be "the band that binds" the cycle, which the poet identifies as "the Faith". As in the figure traced by Noah's Ark, the beginning and the end are counted as one and six, but they coincide at a single point. The way the band weaves back and forth between the five separate points must be a model of what Ephrem means by "roaming", for this characterization of the Christian poet's art is clustered with the image of the crown in the nexus marked by the number five. The resemblance with the "loop" described by Noah's Ark is evident. The end of the quest is reached when the "band" of faith returns to the Union, in *de fide* 85,11: "O Pearl, I've roamed in Thee! Let me collect my mind!"

This way of relating the "roaming" of the poet to the figure of the crown finds confirmation in the negative parody of *de fide* 87,15 (note the number five once more!):

Instead of dumb thorns woven from a speechless briar,
eloquent thorns he weaves of sound
and intellect, like odes (the liar!),
brambles concealed in songs which all good sense confound.

Satan, no longer content with a mere Crown of Thorns, now employs against Christ a new torture: crucifixion by bad poetry! "Weaving a crown" is evidently Ephrem's metaphor for the poet's craft, even when the result is diabolically incomprehensible. Incidentally, this stanza justifies all the effort we have expended on Ephrem in the belief that he always intended his poetry to be thoroughly, albeit never definitively, understood.

The crown formed by the pentangle resembles a crown of thorns; but it looks even more like the radiate crown attributed to the Unconquered Sun in the iconography of Roman coins which circulated in Ephrem's lifetime. Ephrem, like the Emperor Constantine, was not averse to comparing Christ to the sun. More specifically he matches the Son with the second member of that trinity which is constituted by "the bright one" (that is, the heavenly body itself), "radiance", and "heat" (see, for example, *de fide* 73-75). Of all crowns depicted in Roman art, then, the radiate crown is the most suited to the "radiant" Son of Ephrem's poetry.

b. Solomon's Knot and the Wisdom of Christ

King Solomon was famous for his wisdom. In Ephrem's thought, the pentangle, which is often (though not, to my knowledge, by Ephrem) called "Solomon's Knot", stands for the quest itself, not for wisdom, which is its goal. This we have detected by looking for a factor common to the image of the crown and to the idea of "roaming", which Ephrem uses in describing his art. The frequency with which a stanza numbered five or fifteen is devoted to one or both of these, or else to the counterpart of the latter, the "straying" of minds which do not respect the limits set to investigation, suggested that the association of these concepts had something to do with the symbol of the number five. Why this should be so, the five senses, the five wounds of Christ, and the crown-like form of the pentagon and pentangle helped us to understand. King Solomon unites in his person the crown, the poet and the philosopher, so it is appropriate that the pentangle should be called his knot. But although he was famous for his wisdom, this fame was not deserved, except insofar as he prophesied Christ. Such, at least, is the perspective of St Ephrem. Accordingly, Solomon's Knot represents for our poet the quest for wisdom, with all its hazards. The goal is only reached when the figure is closed. But in that moment the first point of the pentangle becomes the sixth and the number is reached which Ephrem associates with wisdom. Ode three on the pearl, *de fide* 83 (the refrain of which is that of ode one), exemplifies this symbolism.

Possible scriptural references for *de fide* 83:

- Stanza* 2: Matt. 22,12; Gen. 3,1 ff.
- Stanza* 3: Job 28,18 ff. (Peshitta); Isa. 42,6.
- Stanza* 4: Acts 8,26 ff.; Cant. 3,9 f.
- Stanza* 5: Cant. 1,3.
- Stanza* 6: Acts 8,27; Isa. 53,7-8; Rev. 21,23; Matt. 10,16; 1 Kgs. 10,1 ff.; 11,4; 2 Sam. 21,17; 1 Kgs. 11,36; Ps. 132,17.
- Stanza* 8: Ps. 104,25-6.
- Stanza* 9: Cant. 1,10; Phil. 2,16.
- Stanza* 11: Cant. 8,5.
- Stanza* 12: Cant. 1,4; Matt. 13,45-6; 25,10-11; 22,2 ff. (esp. 22,12).
- Stanza* 13: 1 Tim. 2,9.
- Stanza* 14: Matt. 7,6.
- Stanza* 15: John 10,9; Matt. 16,18-19; 17,24 ff.; Rev. 21,21; Eph. 1,13.

The Third of the Five Odes on the Pearl (*de fide* 83)

- 1 Thy stripping, pearl, cannot thy pure repute impair.
 Drunk with thy love, the merchant tears
 thy clothes off, *thee* no rapist bares!
 Thy sheen's thy shift, thy light's thy robe, O stripped one fair!
- 2 Image of Eve art thou, robed in her nakedness.
 Tricked by the snake, she lost her sheen:
 never shall he make dull thy gleam!
 In Paradise thy Maker's Glow is women's dress!
- 3 The pearls of Cush, as Scripture says, are passing bright.
 The Light of all the Gentiles bore
 thy brightness to that dusky shore.
 His Rays dispelled the darkness of all black men's night.
- 4 Philip espied a faithful son of dusky Ham,
 who met, between the prophet's lines,
 on chariot high, the shining Lamb!
 The Black immersed himself in light and took the reins.
- 5 By teaching he converted black men into whites.
 He offered up the darkling girls
 of Cush, a crown of gleaming pearls,
 to Christ, through Whom the Father, too, in Cush delights.
- 6 To Sheba's queen, that ewe which braved the wolf's domain,
 Solomon gave that Lamp of Christ,
 which, apostate, the fool despised.
 Her path was lit—in darkness yet the Jews remain!
- 7 The lamp with which that holy queen returned in state
 fostered in dark domains its flame,
 until the Son's new dawning came.
 When that Ray met this flame, the land was filled with light.
- 8 The sea is filled with creatures gilled of monstrous size;
 yet these are not so great at all:
 thou makest great the Crown, though small,
 reflecting Christ, who made man great by His small state.
- 9 A crown for heads, a feast for eyes, a ring for ears!
 Climb from the sea, land's neighbour, come
 and settle near the hearing's home!
 In loving thee her ear the Word of Life adores.
- 10 Within the ear the Word and, pinned without, the stone!
 Adorned with thee, by thee made wise,
 attuned she'll be to Truth's advice,
 Whose Beauty is reflected for her in thine own.
- 11 In thee she finds a symbol of the highborn Word.
 Fruit hangs on leaf and leaf on tree;
 a fleshy lobe envelopes thee;
 an Apple bright within the womb of Mary stirred!

- 12 The Virgin's Child told parables concerning pearls.
 How came they in the Bridegroom's hall,
 those five wise maids with lamps lit all?
 Like thee, their light their garment was, those shining girls!
- 13 Who would adorn with precious pearls a pauper's face
 (for what is dear she may not wear)?
 Dear though it be, the Faith is free,
 and well becomes all members of the human race.
- 14 The noble girl for gold will not exchange her pearl.
 For thee to cast thy pearl in slime
 for nothing were a dreadful crime!
 In temporal pearls, then, let us see the eternal pearl!
- 15 Time's pearls are pursed and sealed within the ruler's hall.
 Outside the door are many gates
 with bolts and locks and keys and plates.
 Thy Pearl the high seal bears of Him who taxes all.

The ode begins dramatically, with a rich man stripping the clothes off a "girl" whom he passionately desires. This vivid and violent image is succeeded immediately by another, tranquil and beguiling: a company of naked women roam at ease in a beautiful garden. In the following three stanzas we are introduced to a royal eunuch from exotic Cush (Ethiopia) and to a cluster of girls, black but comely (Song of Solomon 1,5), presented by the eunuch to a princely figure, whose "Sire" approves the gift. The scene then changes to the court of King Solomon (he who ended up bowing down to the gods of his many foreign wives), where the Queen of Sheba is represented as a ewe in the presence of a wolf. Violence, at least in potential, rears its head again.

The ode then undergoes a sudden change. Leaving the "ewe" of Sheba bathed in the light of that Lamb whom the eunuch saw between Isaiah's lines, we find ourselves watching fish of enormous length, swimming in the sea. Next our attention is drawn to the ear-lobe of a beautiful girl on the adjacent shore and to the pearl ear-ring which hangs in it. The jewel near this girl's orifice resembles an apple and its "fleshy tree" evokes, to the poet's mind, a pregnant womb. No sooner has this image faded, when the "five virgins who entered Paradise" replace it. We recall the parable (Matt. 25,1 ff.) and are astonished to find the bridegroom, who is evidently Christ, leading the virgins into His bed-chamber, as if they all wanted to be counted among His brides. The only figure in the whole ode who does not fit into the grand mosaic of an oriental serail is the apostle Philip, who only serves to introduce the eunuch. At the end of the ode the contrasting

portraits of a poor girl and a rich girl are succeeded by the clashing of doors and the clanging of keys in the corridors of that vast treasury where the King stores the tribute of his subjects. Since the identification of pearls with girls runs through the whole composition, it is natural to see in the pearls of tribute which are "pursed and sealed and locked away" the foreign ladies of a sultan's labyrinthine harem.²⁷

Ode three is divided into two parts by the massive caesura which marks the mid-point of the cycle. In a sense, therefore, it contains that sixth point, halfway along one of the connecting lines, on which the symmetry of the "pentangular cycle" hinges. More than that: the imaginary line between this point and the angle opposite to it passes through the centre of the figure, which two such imaginary lines would be sufficient to pin-point exactly. The relationship of this pivotal ode with the number six is confirmed by the number of stanzas in the cycle, seventy-two, because, when seventy-two is divided in half, the result is six times six.

The caesura on which the cycle hinges is flanked on the right (Syriac is written from right to left) by a *terzain* epitomizing the consummation of the human yearning for enlightenment and, on the left, by a *terzain* evoking the phallic image of immensely long sea-creatures. The first is associated with the safety of dry land, the second with the danger of the deep sea. Here we recognize once more the two sides of the coin: passionate desire can be directed towards heavenly wisdom, or else towards bestial sex. We begin to understand why this ode is marked by the number six and what the Five Wise Virgins are doing in this web of erotic images. Their Bridegroom is the sixth factor on which the Faith hinges, as the cycle on the pearl hinges on its central caesura. When they consummate their union with Him, they recover the state of Grace enjoyed in the Garden by their first Mother Eve, before she became conscious of her nakedness.

In Ephrem's work, as in Nature and in Scripture, nothing is accidental:

Wherever you turn your eyes, there is God's symbol.
 Whatever you read, there you will find His types.
 (*de uirginitate* 20,12; tr. Brock)

²⁷ It seems to follow from various fairy-tales (for example, the one about the pearl of the Shah Perozes in chapter four of the first Book of Procopius's *Wars*) that the largest and the most perfect pearls eventually found their way into the treasuries of kings; in *de fide* 16,6-7 Ephrem depicts himself as a merchant offering a pearl to a king (tr. Brock in *Luminous Eye*, 59).

It is no accident, for example, that the comely black girls in stanza five are the *disciples* of the apostolic eunuch. This encourages us to visualise their number as twelve. In stanza twelve, however, we find, not twelve, but five virgins, “shining girls” who by their sheen remind us of the “gleaming pearls” with which the Cushite maidens were compared in stanza five. Stanza five, true to form, made a “crown” of these “gleaming pearls”, so a circle of twelve pearls is superimposed on the pentangle of five suggested by the number of the stanza. Stanza fifteen likewise invites us by its number to look for the crown once more. Our mind, now being open to the model of a twelve-pearled crown, amalgamates it with the image presented in stanza fifteen, of a number of entrances on the outside of a king’s palace, and arrives at the Jerusalem on High, a circular walled city with twelve gates, which are actually twelve great pearls (Rev. 21,21). The pearls, precious stones, are like the twelve Apostles, epitomized in Cephas, “the Stone”, the Keeper of the Keys (Matt. 17,18-19). Christ, too, is a precious stone, “the stone which the builders rejected” (Mark 12,10). Moreover, He is the “door of the sheepfold” (John 10,1-9).

To these images ode three adds that of the bridegroom encircled by his numerous brides. We begin to see the unity of the composition. Just as the merchant seeks pearls of fine quality, and finds the pearl of great price, so the soul’s quest for union with Christ takes it through the channels of many symbols. Believers all have the apostolic vocation to make their lives, too, visible channels through which others may find the invisible Doorway. The Christian poet’s art is his way of working out this apostolic vocation. He, too, is a merchant with a double quest: to “collect pearls” of quality, his odes (*de fide* 85,12), and so to find the Union for himself. On the other hand, since he publishes the “log-book” of his quest, insofar as he is able to articulate it in accordance with his faith, he also “gathers pearls” by saving the souls of his own disciples. This two-way quality of the Christian vocation explains why, in John 10, the disciples are invited to identify themselves with the shepherd, as well as with the sheep, who “pass in and out” through Christ (Himself the Lamb, the Shepherd and the “door of the sheep”). At 21,17, Jesus says to Cephas: “pasture my ewes.” The poet of the cycle on the pearl, as we have seen, identifies himself with Cephas and reads this as a personal vocation.²⁸

²⁸ This passage might have been enriched for him by the etymological and

c. *The nature of the profit*

The finely balanced statement of *de paradiso* 1,2, which I quoted in my commentary on *de fide* 81,5, contains the image of a “quest for profit”, undertaken in a spirit of “love” and “yearning”. This image, like those of the balance and the abacus (sections two and three of this paper), fits the mercantile model from which my title is derived. “O Pearl, I’ve roamed in Thee!” says the poet, as if the pearl, like the Ark (with which it is compared in *de fide* 81,5), were a sailing vessel, a spiritual merchantman. The pentangle could be an emblem representing a commercial network; over considerable distances merchandise is exchanged, increasing in quantity at every turn, just as the line of the geometrical figure ends where it begins, enriched with an arithmetical profit, which (amongst other “conjuring tricks”) turns “point one” into “point six”. That is all very well, but how exactly are we to conceive of the profit gained by the poet, and precisely what poetic technique is represented by the weaving course of the line?

The best way of answering these two questions is with an example. I have chosen one—stanza twelve of the ode just quoted in full, *de fide* 83—which has the added merit of illuminating Ephrem’s understanding of the “splendid gown” in the ballad of St Thomas. Here is a literal translation:

In you, pearl, He found a parable for that Kingdom,
but the five virgins who entered it
were wrapped in the light of their lamps.
It is you they resemble, those luminous women,
clothed as you are in light!

In Matt. 22,2 ff. we read of a royal wedding, from which one of the guests is violently ejected at the King’s behest, having no answer to the question: “How camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment?” The five foolish virgins of another parable (Matt. 25,1 ff.) resemble this guest, being excluded from the wedding for lack of oil in their lamps. Given that the wedding is an image of the Kingdom of Heaven, as Ephrem assumes, whatever it is that a human being needs to be included in it can be called a “garment” at one time, and “oil” or “light” at another. Ephrem envisages a coat of oil on the naked body of a pearl-fisher, whose

(with regard to the last connection) quasi-etymological cluster formed by the following Syriac words: *r°i* (“roam at grass”, “ruminant”, “pasture”), *re°yōnō* (“the seat of understanding in the heart”), *tar°ithō* (“thought”), *ra°i* (“reconcile”), *tar°ūthō* (“reconciliation”) and *tar°ō* (“entrance”, “doorway”).

gleaming skin seems to wear a “coat of light”:

Through the mystery of the truth Leviathan is trodden underfoot
by men subject to death. Men-who-immense-themselves stripped
naked and clothed themselves in oil. By the sign of the anointed
one they stole you and moved upwards. Naked men snatched the
soul from his mouth, for all his bitter raging.
(*de fide* 82,10)

The allegory suggests baptism, especially since Christian Baptism, as Ephrem experienced it, involved the anointing of the naked body before it was immersed in consecrated water. Anointing and immersion were the two processes involved in having a thorough bath in Roman times. From the strigil and the pool human skin emerged shining, as clothes blackened with mud are restored by washing to their pristine whiteness.

Philip saw a eunuch from Cush on the chariot. The black man met
with the lamb of light out of the space between the lines while he
was reading. The Cushite immersed himself and was clothed in
light and gleamed and governed (sc. his chariot, symbolic of his
country; cf. Acts 8,26 ff.).
(*de fide* 83,4)

The “profit gained” by *de fide* 83,2 is a better understanding of a nexus of riddles in Nature and in Scripture. The pearl, naked but unashamed, teaches Christians to connect up the ideas of the garment, the oil, the lamps, and the virgin brides. When they do so, they see that Christian Baptism can restore to a human being the pristine “sheen” of Adam and Eve before the Fall. This is the only garment which they need to be welcome at the “royal wedding”.

d. Plotting the quest

The starting-point and the finishing-point of *de fide* 83,12 is the pearl. The garment, the oil, the lamps, and the virgin brides are four intermediate points which the stanza connects with the first and with each other. If we take the previous stanza, *de fide* 83,11, we find a similar pattern.

In thee she finds a symbol of the highborn Word.
Fruit hangs on leaf and leaf on tree;
a fleshy lobe envelopes thee;
an Apple bright within the womb of Mary stirred!

Given the equivalence between the pearl and Christ, between point one and point six, as it were, the same concept, first grasped, then enriched by associations, this stanza is constructed

like that on the five virgins. The intermediate points are four concepts: earlobe, tree, fruit, womb. Pinned to the earlobe the pearl resembles a fruit hanging on a tree, especially since the words "lobe" and "leaf" are related (they are identical in Syriac). Christ, too, was pinned to a "tree", the Cross, which can be seen as the Tree of Life, so that Christ's Body is the Fruit which gives its eater eternal life. Out of Christ's death on the Cross came life for mankind, in exchange for the death which had resulted from Eve eating the fruit of another tree. So the poet's eye sees the embryo of Christ in the womb of Mary as an "apple" in the "stomach" of that "second Eve". This picture, too, can be harmonised with the pearl on the earlobe, not only because both pictures include an orifice of the female body, but also because the earlobe, like the womb, is a nest of flesh.

The pentangle expresses diagrammatically an associative thought-pattern of this kind. Ephrem's "pentangular" thoughts can often be analysed in a similar way; sometimes we cannot find five separate points which are linked up, only four. Then we can think of the figure traced in making the sign of the Cross, then returning to the point at which one started. But the pentangle has one advantage which that figure lacks: it also expresses the importance of the central mystery which the poet's words (the continuous line of the diagram) cannot describe. At the centre of every pentangle, however small, is a pentagonal reserve. By drawing other pentangles within this reserve, its area can be swiftly reduced. That is a splendid icon of the Christian poet's art. Each of his stanzas, each of his odes, each of his cycles, each of his collections, indeed his whole vast *œuvre*, is unified around one central point, the Mystery of Christ. This Mystery cannot be explained away, but repeated, cumulative "meditations on what is revealed" (the phrase used by Ephrem in *de paradiso* 1,2 to describe his "search") can serve to circumscribe and define it, so that the eye of the soul is trained on it with less possibility of distraction, in the intensity of wordless prayer.

May my search not be held blameworthy
by You, concealed from all;
for I have not made bold to speak
of Your generation, hidden from all;
in silence
I have bounded the Word.
(*de paradiso* 4,11; tr. Brock)

It is in this "central reserve" that the search will go on; the articulation of insights already acquired is an affirmation of faith.

What Ephrem gave to the world was a “log-book” of his own “roaming” course over the ocean of sense towards the “longed-for haven”. That is the secret of his haunting quality. Like the pearl he loved, his poetry is limpid, yet not transparent. It leaves the reader with the feeling that he or she has a firmer and more articulate grasp of the Christian Faith and, at the same time, with an irresistible desire to penetrate more deeply into the mystery. What diagram could better express this than the pentangle? At infinity the centre is reached; but what is infinitely small coalesces with what is infinitely large. It is the epitome of Ephrem’s meditation on the pearl, “whose smallness is her greatness”.

Contrary to what one might think, active enquiry is best pursued in silence and humility, not vociferously; whereas faith, far from being mute and unquestioning, is innovative, articulate and bold. This paradox is beautifully expressed in *de fide* 20.

An Ode on Sound and Silence (*de fide* 20)

- 1 Faith I offer now, my Lord, in song to Thee.
Prayer & searching can exist without a sound:
Mind conceives in stillness & its child is crowned
in silence, inwardly.
Chorus: Blest Thy Birth, unknown to all, except Thy Sire.
- 2 When the womb withholds its fruit, two lives are lost.
Let my voice express my faith, not hold it in!
Faith withheld will perish & if then I sing,
my words will turn to dust.
- 3 Dry within, the blasted fig withholds its shoot.
Sap engenders and imparts to buds their sheen.
Let my faith rejoice, for by God’s Grace my green
wood bears the Spirit’s fruit.
- 4 See the green shoot rend the veil of earth in twain;
Full of mystic seed, behold the spike appear!
Pregnant with the fruits of praise, the Faith will bear
a hundredfold, like grain.
- 5 As a fish takes refuge in its womb, the sea,
Diving deep & cheating anglers of their prey,
Sunken in clear thought, & disinclined to stray,
the centred soul is free.
- 6 Like a girl, untarnished Prayer should stay at home.
Love, upon the bed of Truth, shall crown her quest.
At her door two silent eunuchs (fingers pressed
on lips) ... lest she should roam!

- 7 Prayer, vowed to Christ, avoids the public sphere.
Faith, the bride, is fêted, full in public view.
From the mouth Voice lifts her up and takes her to
the bedroom of the ear.
- 8 Fear made many shirk their duty to defend:
Deep within their hearts they trusted in our Lord;
Yet, because their voice withheld faith's public word,
their silence was condemned.
- 9 Jonah's prayer, unsounded, reached that Ear on high.
He, the herald, gagged within that fish's womb,
Dumbly squirmed his thanks & praise to God, for whom
his silence was a cry.
- 10 Married in one body, Prayer & Faith reside,
Modest, bold, reflecting One both veiled & shown.
Modest prayer appeals to secret ears alone,
bold faith to those outside.
- 11 Like a flavour, prayer within our body lies.
Let the scent of faith abound & fill the air!
Herald Smell announces Taste to buyers, where
they sample sacks of spice.
- 12 Nothing can divide the wings of love & truth.
Truth can never fly without the help of love.
Love alone can never reach the skies above,
for one Will yokes them both.
- 13 Double though the pupils be, their glance is one.
Nose's bridge, though set between them, joins the eyes;
Nor can even surreptitious signs surprise
one sister on her own.
- 14 Never did twin feet at once two paths bestride.
Cloven is the heart which in two paths would stray.
Of its own free will it takes the double way
of darkness & of light.
- 15 Feet & eyes, two pairs, shall chide the cloven man.
O that lazy ox! That even heart at odds!
Self-divided, let him shoulder two yokes, God's
& Satan's, if he can!
- 16 To the accursèd Ploughman his stiff neck is bowed.
Though the stony, pathless land obstructs the share,
Devil's Thorn, the crop of sin, is broadcast there
& makes a ready goad.
- 17 May the prayer within me clear my muddled heart
& may faith restore my outward senses' sheen;
Single, though divided, may this human being
find union where Thou art!

5 CONCLUSION

This ode, *de fide* 20, exemplifies all the elements of Ephrem's art which have been identified in this article. The idea of a quest for union, for singleness in dividedness, underlies the ballad of St Thomas, with which I began; and, like that ballad, Ephrem's ode teaches that the counterpart of the Union which lies at the bottom of the sea is to be found in the heights, at the Court of Heaven. *Balance*, which *de fide* 49 taught us to find in the form and content of Ephrem's poetry, is found in the piling up of sound, faith and scent as a counterweight to silence, prayer and flavour. It is also present in the symmetry of wings, pupils and feet. As for the pivotal bar, the yoke resembles it and at the same time demonstrates that there can be no equilibrium between justice and evil. *Number* was the leitmotiv of my commentary on *de fide* 81. There are two numerical sequences in *de fide* 20, both going from one to seven; stanzas eight, nine and ten form a kind of pivotal section between them. This requires a longer explanation.

The first sequence starts with a duality, it is true: vocal faith is opposed to silent prayer. Yet the whole poem shows that these are two aspects of Christian life which are "married" (stanza 10), like the scent and the flavour of a spice (stanza 11); likewise, human nature, in Christ, is "single, though divided". The twin children of thought, prayer and searching, distinguished in stanza 1, are treated as a single entity (the allegorized "Quest") in stanzas 6-7. The number of stanza *two* suggests that articulation, too, is a kind of birth, and that every pregnancy needs delivery, if "two lives", both that of the mother and that of the child, are to be saved. *Three* introduces the Holy Spirit and suggests that we should look for the other two Persons of the Trinity: "sound", "voice", "word" and "the blasted fig" lead to Christ, but so does prayer, because, like Christ's eternal generation from the Father, its generation is achieved within the mind. The mind, after all, is the part of a human being which most resembles God the Father. So human perfection involves a process which mirrors God's activity: mind generates prayer, which has a second birth in the world of sense in the form of praise; and what makes this possible is the "sap" of the Spirit flowing in the "green wood" of human nature. *Four* propels us into time by focussing implicitly on the moment of Christ's death on the Cross (cf. Luke 23,46); this is the pivot of history, because what was hidden before then, the mysteries of the Old Testament and the meaning of the natural Creation, is now revealed. That moment was a kind of birth, containing all

the significance of Christ's rebirth out of the dark womb of the earth thereafter; and the secret of the life within the dead-and-buried seed is the same as the secret of Ephrem's poetic inspiration and fertility, for the poet, too, is pregnant and gives birth. *Five* gives the sign to introduce a fish, one of the creatures dating from the "fifth day" of Creation. This fish moves upwards like the wheat-shoot and breaks the surface of its own dark womb, but the result is not life, but death. To live, the fish must plunge into the depths of its own element, far from the hook of the angler. So meditation must be centred; the power of thought should not, Ephrem argues, be misused to "poke our nose" outside our natural habitat, however much curiosity might tempt us to do so. *Six* suggests sex, because God instituted organic reproduction on the "sixth day"; in stanza six, accordingly, wisdom is described as the transcendence and internalisation of sexual intercourse. The echo of the questing girl in the Song of Solomon²⁹ introduces another association with wisdom and suggests a way of approaching that famous allegory. *Seven* makes it seem as if Quest and Faith are the same "girl" under two aspects, as fiancée and as bride. It confirms that Voice, "her Lord," is to be identified with Christ, the Prince. It represents the ear as a "type" of the Holy of Holies, in which ultimate union will be achieved. By so doing it anticipates the summit of the second series in stanza seventeen.

The three pivotal stanzas are not so detached as they seem, yet this seeming detachment puts a clear division between the two series of seven stanzas. Stanza eight, had it belonged to the series, should have been about resurrection and eternal life; instead, it is about those who failed to become martyrs. At the same time it is an exegesis of the "blasted fig" of stanza three: Christ cursed the fruitless fig-tree to show that anyone who suppresses their witness to Him out of the fear of death, or for any other reason, will be condemned by God and will lose the life-giving sap of His Spirit. Stanza nine, the central stanza of the ode, unites prayer and faith in the image of Jonah, fish-like in the belly of the whale. The irony of it is that Jonah, though a "type" of the resurrected Christ evoked by stanza four, also provides a famous example of that articulated scepticism with regard to God's Purposes, which for Ephrem, is "straying", a wrong use of human intelligence. Jonah's straying did indeed lead him to "poke his nose" into a hostile element and so be caught, albeit by a fish, not by an angler; yet by

²⁹ Note the echoes of the Song throughout this ode, e.g. Cant. 3,1-2.6; 4,10.12-16.

God's Mercy he was saved. This qualifies the picture of Christ, the strict Judge, the blaster of barren fig-trees: divine mercy is great. Stanza ten shifts the marital imagery of stanzas six and seven by identifying prayer and faith, not with fiancée and bride, but with wife and husband, respectively. It thus completes the internal commentary on the first series of seven stanzas and opens the way for the second.

The second series begins with another phenomenon displaying the possibility of *unity* in diversity, which is a major theme of the ode: spice has a flavour and a scent, and the latter is the "herald" of the former. The word "herald" takes us back to Jonah, who was both in the body of the whale and, as herald to Nineveh, outside it, an example of how one can be "centred" and also bear witness in words by one's "roaming". Stanza twelve gives us an image of *duality* in perfect unanimity, the obverse of the coin presented in stanza eleven. "Love" and "truth", which were personified rather mysteriously in stanza six, surely as one and the same spiritual bridegroom, Christ, are here identified with prayer and faith in a human being. That suggests that Christ is acting through these contrasting functions inside our bodies. Stanza thirteen, sliding from wings to lashes, introduces the *trinity* of eyes with nose between, stanza fourteen the *two contrasting pairs* of the twin feet and the divergent paths. Stanza fifteen gathers the two eyes and the two feet together and contrasts their witness to unanimity with the split character of a *fifth* figure, "cloven man", who, by the association with cloven hooves, is then immediately addressed as an ox. The symmetry of the human body, which should be an example of unity in diversity, is reflected also in the "even" structure of the human heart. By saying that the malfunctioning heart is "at odds", Ephrem alludes to the characteristics of the number five, which I have explored at length in this article. The *six* of sex and fertility is parodied in verse sixteen by the picture of the devil ploughing barren ground with great difficulty by goading on the "lazy ox", divided man, with the phallic thorn of his only harvest, sin. This stanza acts as an evil counterpart to the chaste wisdom displayed by Quest in stanza six. It also underlines how burdensome the "easy way" of "straying" can be; Christ's yoke is lighter, because the deep soil He ploughs has been cleared of stones, unlike the "pathless land" where grows the barb of sin. Finally, with a suggestion that a "troubled heart" is like a field clogged with stones and boulders, stanza *seven* brings the Christian home to the hope of his eventual reunification in the ultimate Holy of Holies after death.

This ode thus demonstrates that the “fruit of multiplication” is not always the same, even though it is based on something as simple as an *arithmetical series*: this method of meditation produces fresh varieties each time it is applied to a new subject. It confirms that Ephrem’s technique of formal composition is disciplined and economical in the extreme, while at the same time following a dreamlike stream of consciousness by lateral association, as a dancer completes a circle by being passed on from hand to hand by other dancers. It also provides another example of the significance of the *number of syllables* in an Ephremic stanza; that of *de fide* 20 is composed of groups of five and six in various combinations, whereby six tips the balance in the end, a perfect reflection, given the linking of five to investigation and six to wisdom, of the inward thrust of quest and faith and its ultimate homecoming in God’s perfection.

Finally (while stanza five unfortunately fails to produce a starfish to confirm the diagram I have extrapolated from the cycle on the pearl!), the interplay of sound and silence and their ultimate identification are well represented by the contrast between the interwoven line and the white reserve at the centre of the *pentangle*, and by the dynamic series of concentric pentangles, at the end of which lies the unattainable centre of the figure. This ode is a good example of an Ephremic “mind-map” on a larger scale than that of the single stanza. The starting-point is sound, contrasted, then identified with silence; the finishing-point is Christ, the unspoken Word, the Union, in which sound and silence coalesce. The four intermediate points of the pentangle can be identified as the motifs whose interconnection weaves poetic unity in this ode: fertility, coupling, the yoke, sin. In fact, this ode teaches us how the balance is related to the quest. On a “mind-map” it is possible to distribute a large number of concepts to either side of the central divide suggested by the contrast between sound and silence. Voice, word, preaching, expression, child, birth, light, understanding as against stillness, silence, meditation, privacy, mother, burial, darkness, fertility. Arrogance as against humility, boldness as against modesty, courage as against cowardice, man as against eunuch, husband as against wife, bride as against unmarried girl - and so on. But having plotted such a neat division, it becomes necessary, on further consideration, to draw cross-connections which bind pairs of concepts across the divide. The diagram of the pentangle can represent such a cohesive “mind-map”, even if the cross-connections are less or more than five or

six in number. Ephrem himself carries out this operation so thoroughly and ingeniously that he ends with the paradox of unity in diversity, in which he finds the essence of Christ, "the Veiled One who is shown" (stanza 10).

In *de fide* 20, the merchant appears once more, as the purveyor of spice, rather than pearls. This image enriches the metaphor of my title: the customer, that is, the reader of Ephrem's poetry, can enjoy its "scent", or aesthetic beauty, without being committed to anything. But if he goes so far as to yield, at a street corner, to the public temptation of Ephrem's beguiling language, and pays the price necessary to take his poetry into his own "inner room" in order to possess it fully, as a man thinks to claim the body of a beautiful woman by sexual intercourse, he will discover the "taste" which lies within that body, the mystery of communion with God, which is the origin of that beguiling odour.

Ephrem, the celibate deacon, watched with dismay the growth outside his cloister of the conflicts which would lead, shortly after his death, to violence being committed against the Catholic Church by her "husband", the Roman emperor. In the autumn of 373 the Arians, with imperial authority, took over the cathedral church of the city where Ephrem died. The poet, predictably, identified with the "woman" in this large-scale "gender-conflict". Lacking a weapon, he exercised his charm to the utmost in the service of reconciliation. Yet he did not believe in reconciliation at all costs. For Ephrem, Christian discourse circumscribes, though it cannot describe, the Truth. The single aim of his complex art is to draw those distant from the centre into its vortex and so escape the disintegrating force of centrifugal doubt. He refused vehemently to abandon the slogan "many nations and one Doctrine", on which, he felt, both the peace of the Empire and the reconciliation of mankind with God depended. With a bitterness which reflects the intensity of his commitment to this ideal, he rejects divisive ideas, whether stemming from the concept of a single Nation or from that of a plurality of doctrines. The collection of eighty-seven odes *On the Faith* was Ephrem's feminine, but manly, contribution to the cause of concord.

Now the ordeal is nigh!
 Athletes, jump for joy!
 This is your chance to
 go for gold!

The refrain of *de fide* 80 is a trumpet-call to martyrdom. Yet the stanzas of that ode are not aggressive. The first stanza maintains

that faith is like a second soul: if faith is lost, the body, though organically alive, is, in spiritual terms, a walking corpse. The relevance of this to the crisis of the 370s is clear: Ephrem's fellow-Catholics should have no hesitation about opposing imperial authority, even to the death, if submitting to it would mean the loss of their Faith. That Christian poetry and philosophy are as important in such a crisis as at any time for Ephrem is shown by stanza eight. In this stanza, the number of which, like the number of the ode in the whole collection, invites us to think of resurrection, the Sacraments, eternal life and, in this context, of martyrdom, he places his plainest statement of the vocation which we have been trying to describe:

The veiled, in types made palpable,
shall thus become as visible
unto thine eyes, those camels, which
thy body needs to make it rich.
The merchant roams: intelligence,
in Faith's ship, seeks for Life through sense.

Having shown that he will make his stand as a poet with the martyrs, Ephrem mobilizes that queen of all symbols, the pearl, refuting the Arian interpretation of Scripture from the evidence of Nature with such consummate art, that any intelligent reader must have felt obliged to question his own doubts. In the last two odes of the collection, Ephrem does, at last, become aggressive. In *de fide* 86 he brings to mind the wisdom of the holy men and women of the past and condemns "Hellenic" intellectual arrogance as a diabolical disease which is capable of rotting even the wheat stored in God's barn, the souls of the baptized. Finally, in *de fide* 87 he says that disputation and the greed for power have corrupted even God's priests and that they are now cooperating with the Devil in the "recrucifixion" of Christ. At the end of that ode he suggests that the Crown is unimpeachable, but priests are causing kings to stumble by teaching them to wage war within the Church. The last stanza of all expresses Ephrem's hope that the great ideal of Christian Rome may be achieved in spite of everything:

O Lord God, soothe both kings and priests and in one Church
let priests pray for their kings, let kings
have mercy on their cities' walls!
In Thee let peace internal be our circled strength!

Evidently he believed that his art was more than just the record of an interior journey. He thought it could influence the out-

come of events. His unrelenting urge to integrate experience with thought and quiet prayer with active faith would not have allowed him to separate his own life from that of the society around him or to consider the fate of that society unimportant just because it could not be eternal.

ABBREVIATIONS

de fide = *Hymni de fide* (see Beck 1955, in the summary of previous work, below)

de natiuitate = *Hymni de natiuitate*, ed. E. Beck in CSCO 186-7, SS 82-3

de paradiso = *Hymni de paradiso*, ed. E. Beck in CSCO 174-5, SS 78-9

de uirginitate = *Hymni de uirginitate*, ed. E. Beck in CSCO 223-4, SS 94-5

Ephrem = Jacob of Serugh's verse-homily on Ephrem, ed. P. Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum* III (Paris 1892; reprint Hildesheim 1968) 665-79

Joseph = *L'Histoire de Joseph* [Syriac text] (Paris - Leipzig 1891²); Latin translation by T.J. Lamy, *S. Ephraem Syri hymni et sermones*, 4 vols. (Mechliniae 1882-1902), III 249-640 and IV 791-844.

SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS WORK ON EPHREM'S CYCLE OF THE PEARL

S.E. Assemanus, *Sancti patris nostri Ephraem Syri opera omnia quae exant Graece Syriace Latine*, vol. III of the works in Syriac and Latin (Romae 1743), 150-64, provided the first edition with a rough translation into Latin, in which the last seven odes on faith were misleadingly described as the "seven *sermones* on the pearl". All translations before 1955 are based on this unsatisfactory text: see S.P. Brock, "A Brief Guide to the Main Editions and Translations of the Works of St Ephrem", *The Harp* 3 (Kottayam, Kerala 1990) 7-25. A new period opened with the critical edition by Edmund Beck, *Des heiligen Ephrem des Syrers Hymnen de Fide* (Louvain 1955) 248-51. This and Beck's literal German translation are published in the CSCO 154 and 155 (SS 73 and 74). Twelve years later François Graffin published a poetic French translation: "Les hymnes sur la perle de Saint Ephrem", *L'Orient Syrien* 12,2 (1967) 129-49. Robert Murray touched on these odes in his *Symbols* (1975; see below, "Further Reading"), and translated some isolated stanzas. Recent English translations of odes 1 and 2 by Sebastian Brock have been published separately in two anthologies by that author: *A Garland of Hymns from the Early Church* (McLean, Virginia 1989) and *The Harp of the Spirit: Eighteen Poems of Saint Ephrem* (Studies Supplementary to Sobornost 4; London 1983²).

FURTHER READING

R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition* (Cambridge 1975), gives a cultural background. S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of St Ephrem* (Rome 1985; now also available in French and Arabic translations), contains a lucid and sympathetic survey of Ephrem's thought, with many extended quotations in

translation. K.E. McVey, *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns* (New York - Mahwah 1989), places Ephrem in his historical context and gives an annotated translation of many of his poems. Another book by Sebastian Brock, *St. Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns on Paradise* (New York 1990), is also to be recommended, not least for its extensive introduction. Jacob of Serugh's verse homily on Ephrem was edited by P. Bedjan in *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum* III (Paris 1892; reprint Hildesheim 1968) 665-79. On this text see Brock, *Paradise* 22-5 and K.E. McVey, "Jacob of Sarug on Ephrem and the Singing of Women", *The Syrian Antiochian Perspective* 1,1 (1992) 36-41. The same number of this welcome new journal contains an article on Wesley and Ephrem by Dale A. Johnson, "St. Ephrem's Influence on the English Reformation", 31-5. For Jacob's letter on the pearl, see F. Graffin, "Le thème de la perle dans une lettre de Jacques de Saroug", *L'Orient Syrien* 47, vol. 12,3 (1967) 355-70. The article "Margaritai", by H. Rommel, in RE 14 (1930) 1682-702, sums up all that the Greek and Latin authors wrote about the pearl. J. Chevalier and A. Gheerbrant, *Dictionnaire des symboles, mythes, rêves, coutumes, gestes, formes, figures, couleurs, nombres* (Paris 1982⁵) 741-4, add information gathered from further afield, albeit without references. F. Ohly, *Schriften zur mittelalterlichen Bedeutungsforschung* (Darmstadt 1977) 274-311, contains two essays on the symbolism of the pearl, "Tau und Perle" (1973) and "Die Geburt der Perle aus dem Blitz" (1974). Christel Meier, *Gemma spiritalis* I (München 1977) 94 ff., tells how Origen first suggested the extended coordination of Christian doctrine with the natural history of the pearl in his commentary on Matthew (GCS 40,162,7 ff.). I have not seen Costantino Vona, "La 'margarita pretiosa' nella interpretazione di alcuni scrittori ecclesiastici", *Divinitas* 1 (1957) 118-60. On the "Robe of Glory" see S.P. Brock, "Clothing metaphors as a means of theological expression in Syriac tradition", in *Typus, Symbol, Allegorie bei den östlichen Vätern und ihre Parallelen im Mittelalter* ed. M. Schmidt and C.F. Geyer (Regensburg 1982) 11-40. On the equilibrium of heart and mind and on Ephrem's quarrel with the Arians see R. Murray, "A Dialogue Between Love and Reason", *Sobornost* 2,2 (1980) 26-40. On the pentangle, see *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* ed. J.R.R. Tolkien etc. (Oxford 1967²).

THE ATTITUDE TOWARDS GREEK POETRY IN THE VERSE OF GREGORY NAZIANZEN

by

KRISTOFFEL DEMOEN

As far as we know, Gregory Nazianzen never systematically treated the position to be adopted by a Christian towards Greek pagan literature. His friend Basil the Great, on the contrary, wrote a well-known treatise, Πρὸς τοὺς νέους, ὅπως ἂν ἐξ Ἑλληνικῶν ὠφελοῖντο λόγων (*Ad adolescentes de legendis libris gentilium*). In this treatise Basil emphasizes that profane authors may be read if their work is 'useful', i.e. if it incites virtue.¹ Apart from that he considers the reading of those authors mainly as a preliminary stage to studying the Bible.

Although Gregory did not write a similar work, he was very well aware of the problem, perhaps more than any other Church Father. The purpose of this article is to investigate Gregory's attitude towards Greek literature, more specifically the ancient Greek poets. This attitude will be illustrated mainly by quotations from his verse: though his explicit statements on the topic are similar in his prose and in his poetry, it seems more interesting to discuss his verse because of its tacit appreciation of the Greek poets. For Gregory indeed imitates and joins the Greek poetical tradition.²

Hellenism was a vexed issue throughout Gregory's life and works.³ He was born between 326 and 330⁴ from Christian pa-

¹ A recent discussion of this treatise in V. Pyykkö, *Die griechischen Mythen bei den großen Kappadokiern und bei Johannes Chrysostomos* (Annales Universitatis Turkuensis B 193, Turku 1991) 31-9. One finds the same basic tenor in Plutarchus *De audiendis poetis* ("mindestens zum Teil wohl einem Vorbild des Basileios", Pyykkö 33), 15C-D and *passim*.

² I do not intend to enumerate the authors Gregory quotes or appears to have read; several scholars have already identified quotations and allusions in Gregory's work. One finds an excellent compilation in B. Wyß, "Gregor von Nazianz", *RAC* 12 (1983) 793-863, esp. 839-59.

³ See, among others, D. Meehan, "St. Gregory Nazianzen and Hellenistic Humanism", *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* 62 (1943) 255-64. Meehan concludes that Gregory is "even more than St. Basil, pre-eminently the Christian Hellenist".

rents, and received a prolonged education in Cappadocian and Palestinian Caesarea, in Alexandria and in Athens, where he stayed for some ten years. In Athens he attended the courses of Himerius and Prohaeresius, and knew Basil and the future emperor Julian as fellow students. He thoroughly enjoyed this mainly rhetorical education: the detailed description in his funeral oration for Basil (*Or.* 43,14-24) proves that he afterwards cherished memories of his Athenian student days.

One finds similar echoes of the young Gregory's fervour for the study of rhetoric and literature in his poems, written several decades after his stay in Athens:

μοῦνον ἔμοι φίλον ἔσκε λόγων κλέος, οὓς συνάγειον
ἀντολίη τε δύσις τε καὶ Ἑλλάδος εὖχος Ἀθῆναι.
τοῖς ἔπι πόλλ' ἐμόγησα πολὺν χρόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτοὺς
πρηνέας ἐν δαπέδῳ Χριστοῦ προπάροισεν ἔθηκα
εἷξαντας μεγάλῳ θεοῦ λόγῳ.

The fame that goes with letters was the only thing that absorbed me.

East and West combined to procure me that, and Athens, the glory of Greece.

I labored much for a long time in the craft of letters; but even these two

I laid prostrate before the feet of Christ
in subjection to the Word of the great God.⁵

It is striking that the older Gregory hastens to stress the eventu-

⁴ For a biography of Gregory we still have to refer to P. Gallay, *La vie de saint Grégoire de Nazianze* (Lyon 1943). See also Wyß 1983 (n. 2) 794-8.

⁵ II,1,1 vv. 96-100 (PG 37,977) = II,2,7 vv. 43-7 (PG 37,1554). (One of Gregory's peculiarities is that he often repeats his own formulas, verses or even whole passages or chapters, as in this case.) Most of Gregory's poems still await a modern critical edition; such an edition of the whole collection is being prepared in Münster under the direction of Prof. M. Sicherl, and will be published in Corpus Christianorum, Series Graeca. Consequently we have to quote from PG 37-8, a reprint of the eighteenth-century edition by the Maurini. They divided the poems rather roughly into two sections: the *theologica* (subdivided into *dogmatica* and *moralia*), and the *historica* (*de seipso* and *quae spectant ad alios*; epigrams and epitaphs are part of this section). The usual reference to the poems (e.g. II,1,1) goes back to this division. I quote the following poems from modern editions: I,2,8: H.M. Werhahn, *Gregorii Nazianzeni Σύγκρισις βίων* (Klassisch-Philologische Studien 15, Wiesbaden 1953); I,2,29: A. Knecht, *Gregor von Nazianz. Gegen die Putzsucht der Frauen* (Heidelberg 1972); II,1,11: C. Jungck, *Gregor von Nazianz. De vita sua* (Heidelberg 1974); II,1,12: B. Meier, *Gregor von Nazianz: Über die Bischöfe* (Carmen 2,1,12). *Einleitung, Text, Übersetzung, Kommentar* (Paderborn 1989). The English translations of passages from II,1,1, II,1,11 and II,1,12 are adopted from D.H. Meehan, *Saint Gregory of Nazianzus. Three Poems* (Washington 1987); the other translations are mine.

al priority of the Christian λόγος (doctrine) over the profane λόγοι (letters).⁶ In his long autobiographical poem he even insinuates that already as a young man he had been eager to study only so as to place the false *logoi* in the service of the true ones:

ἄχνους παρειά, τῶν λόγων δ' ἔρωσ ἐμέ
θερμός τις εἶχε. καὶ γὰρ ἐζήτουν λόγους
δοῦναι βοηθοὺς τοὺς νόθους τοῖς γνησίοις.

When the first down grew on my cheeks a keen passion for letters took possession of me. Moreover I sought to turn bastard letters into the service of those that are genuine.⁷

Gregory is less cautious when he speaks about his own education indirectly, as in an epistolary poem written under the name of his great-nephew Nicobulus.⁸ The young Nicobulus demands from his father of the same name something more than only breeding and feeding. He does not want gold, land, or slaves, but:

ὦ πάτερ, ἐν ποθέω, μύθων κράτος, ἀντί νυ πάντων (v. 58).

In the following verses he specifies what he understands by this: study of rhetoric, history, grammar, logic, ethics and literature (vv. 59-76). Afterwards he will dedicate his mind to God (vv. 77-88)—an addition that makes a rather artificial impression in the context. He refers to his granduncle, Gregory, as his great example, although he knows that he will never succeed in equalling him ... The remaining part of the poem is mainly a eulogy on the μῦθοι, just like the answer of the father, likewise written by Gregory in hexameters.⁹ The first verse is revealing:

Τέκνον ἐμόν, μύθους ποθέων, ποθέεις τὰ φέριστα.

As appears from these quotations, Gregory did not use his education for a worldly career as a rhetor. Instead he dedicated himself to Christ, though unable to decide whether to retreat as an ascetic or to exercise the priest's or bishop's ministry. During the first twenty years after his return to Cappadocia he did not make

⁶ For this idea in Gregory's works, see J.-M. Szymusiak, "Note sur l'amour des lettres au service de la foi chrétienne chez Grégoire de Nazianze", in *Oikoumene. Studi paleocristiani pubblicati in onore del Concilio Ecumenico Vaticano II* (Catania 1964) 507-13, and P.-Th. Camelot, "Amour des lettres et désir de Dieu chez s. Grégoire de Nazianze: les logoi au service du Logos", in *Littérature et religion. Mélanges J. Coppin* (Lille 1966) 23-30. The play upon the words λόγος and μῦθος, very frequent with Gregory, is difficult to render in translations.

⁷ II,1,11 vv. 112-114 (PG 37,1037).

⁸ Παρὰ Νικοβούλου πρὸς τὸν πατέρα, II, 2, 4 (PG 37, 1505-21).

⁹ Νικοβούλου πρὸς τὸν υἱόν, II,2,5 (PG 37,1521-42).

a clear choice, to the dissatisfaction of his father Gregory, bishop of Nazianzus, and his friend Basil, meanwhile bishop of Caesarea. It is in this period that Gregory wrote his notorious invectives against Julian (*Orations* 4 and 5), chiefly attacking the emperor's attempt to consider "Hellenism" as a monopoly of the pagans.

In 379 the relatively small Nicean community of Constantinople invited Gregory to become their leader. The majority of Christians in the eastern capital was Arian at that moment. Gregory agreed with the invitation, became a successful preacher, delivered the five so-called theological orations (*Orations* 27 to 31) that were to yield him the title of Theologian, was nominated as bishop of Constantinople and president of the second Ecumenical Council, and resigned in 381, during the Council, because of internal ecclesiastical reasons. He returned to Cappadocia a rather embittered man, and passed his last years on his country estate Arianzus. In this period he wrote the bulk of his preserved letters and poems.

Gregory's poetry, totalling some 17,000 verses, occupies an exceptional position in the transmitted early Christian Greek literature. The aesthetical appreciation of this corpus by modern scholars is quite divergent.¹⁰ Rather than going into these appreciations, it is more interesting to listen to the reasons Gregory himself gives for writing verses. He voices them clearly in the poem Εἰς τὰ ἔμμετρα. This is an explicitly polemical poem:¹¹ apparently reacting to criticism, the author defends the legitimacy of verse form for theological subjects, by appealing to the example of the Bible and to a didactic point of view. An often-quoted passage lists four reasons that brought Gregory himself to write verses:

- 1) he wanted to bridle his own ἀμετρία (vv. 34-7)
- 2) he wanted to sweeten the bitterness of the Commandments

¹⁰ Even among scholars who have dealt with Gregory's poetry for a longer period, judgements vary from absolutely negative (R. Keydell, "Die literaturhistorische Stellung der Gedichte Gregors von Nazianz", *Atti VII Congr. Int. di Studi Bizantini = Studi Bizantini e Neellenici* 7 [1953] 134-43) or moderate (B. Wyß, "Gregor von Nazianz. Ein griechisch-christlicher Dichter des 4. Jahrhunderts", *MH* 6 [1949] 177-210; Q. Cataudella, "Le poesie di Gregorio Nazianzeno", *Atene e Roma* s. 2, 8 [1927] 88-96) to positive (M. Pellegrino, *La poesia di s. Gregorio Nazianzeno* (Milano 1932); I leave aside the mainly Greek panegyric 'studies'.

¹¹ II, 1, 39 (PG 37, 1329-38). Its tone and its motifs recall the prologue of Callimachus' Αἶτια, see Q. Cataudella, "Il prologo degli Αἶτια e Gregorio Nazianzeno", *RFIC* N.S. 6 (1928) 509-510.

in order to show youth the path to virtue (vv. 37-43)

3) most relevant in our context:

... οὐδ' ἐν λόγοις
πλέον δίδωμι τοὺς ξένους ἡμῶν ἔχειν
τούτοις λέγω δὴ τοῖς κεχωρυσμένοις λόγοις
εἰ καὶ τὸ κάλλος ἡμῖν ἐν θεωρίᾳ.

Even in the field of letters
I cannot bear the idea that outsiders would surpass us;
I mean those varnished letters,
even if beauty for us is situated in mystic vision (vv. 48-51).

4) the composing of hymns was a consolation in his sickly old age (vv. 54-7).

IMPLICIT PRESENCE OF THE GREEK POETS

According to his own saying, Gregory's purpose was not merely to place the profane *logoi* (culture, literature, rhetoric, ...) in the service of Christian *logos* (doctrine, *the Word*, ...), but also to offer an equivalent counterpart to the non-Christian poetical tradition, also from a formal point of view (II,1,39 v. 50; PG 37,1333). This proves his positive appreciation of the form used by the pagan poets—an appreciation which is implicitly confirmed by the form of Gregory's own poetry.

A. Formal imitation

Gregory wrote his poems almost exclusively in the classical *metres*.¹² hexameters in the Homeric and Callimachean tradition, distichs like those of Theognis, trimeters imitating Euripides. The *genres* he practised follow the same tradition: didactic poetry, hymn, elegy, epigram, diatribe, gnome, autobiography (see Solon). One finds *stylistic characteristics* of his examples: Homeric similes with scenes from nature in hexameters, stichomythia in trimeters. One Homeric simile should be sufficiently convincing:

ὥς δ' ὅτε χειμερίοιο παρ' ὄχθησιν ποταμοῖο,
ἢ πίτυν ἢ πλατάνιστον ἐπητανὸν κομόωσαν,
ῥηγνύμενος ῥίξῃσι ῥόος δηλήσατο γείτων
τῆς δὴ τοι πρῶτον μὲν ὑπέχματα πάντα τίναξε,

¹² Two non-prosodic poems have been transmitted under his name, "Ὕμνος ἑσπερινός, I,1,32 (PG 37,511-514), and Πρὸς παρθένους παραινετικός, I,2,3 (PG 37,632-40), but the authenticity of both of them is doubtful.

καὶ κρημνῷ μιν ἔθηκεν ἐπήρορον, αὐτὰρ ἔπειτα
 βαῖησι ῥίζησιν ἐρυκομένην προθέλυμνον,
 κρημνοῦ ἀπορρήξας μεσάταις ἐνὶ κάββαλε δίναις,
 καὶ μιν ἄγων μεγάλῳ πατάγῳ πέτρησιν ἔδωκεν·
 ἔνθα δέ μιν ὄμβρος καὶ ἀφυσγετὸς αἰὲν ἐρείδων
 σῆψαν, ἀτιμότατον δὲ τρύφος παρὰ χεῖλεσι κεῖται.
 ὥς καὶ ἐμὴν ψυχὴν Χριστῷ θαλέθουσας ἀνακτι,
 λάβρος ἐπαΐσσω χαμάδις βάλεν ἐχθρὸς ἀτειρής.

It is as when by the banks of a river in flood
 a pine tree or a flourishing plane
 is torn from its roots by the passing surge and destroyed.
 First all the foundations are undermined,
 and the tree leans headlong over the bank. Then
 it is broken off from the slight roots by which it still clings,
 and it is whirled into the middle of the torrent.
 Amid great crackling it is borne among the rocks,
 where it rots under the constant wear of flood and flotsam.
 There it lies by the banks, a wretched trunk.
 So with my soul. It was flourishing for Christ the King.
 But in furious onset the inexorable enemy cast it to earth.¹³

This passage also shows clearly that the *vocabulary* does not draw from fourth-century spoken language: Gregory's poetic language is completely permeated by that of his predecessors. Nor is this phenomenon limited to 'neutral' terms: epithets such as ἐπιτάρροθος, μεδέων, μητίετα and ὑψιμέδων, with Homer and Hesiod reserved for Zeus and the other Olympic gods, are used by Gregory for Christ or God.¹⁴

B. Imitation of contents

The transposition of such terms immediately evoking associations for everyone familiar with Homer, implies more than a merely formal or verbal presence of the pagan poets. Yet in a poem about dangers and possibilities of the tongue (written on the occasion of a Lent he passed in complete silence) Gregory claims that his themes are of a totally different order:

¹³ II,1,1, vv. 529-40 (PG 37,1009-1010), to be compared with II 11,492-7; 13,137-43; 17,53. See also V. Frangeskou, "Gregory Nazianzen's Usage of the Homeric simile", *Ἑλληνικά* 36 (1985) 12-26. Examples of stichomythia: I,2,8, vv. 1-8 (PG 37,649), 12-25; I,2,28, vv. 237-40 (PG 37,874).

¹⁴ Ἐπιτάρροθος: I,2,2, v. 271 (PG 37,599) and I,2,9A, v. 50 about Christ (beside this he uses it once for humans); he calls God μεδέων: I,2,1, v. 350 (PG 37,548); I,2,5, v. 3 (PG 37,642); II,1,50, v. 99 (PG 37,1392) (beside this twice about the devil: κόσμου μεδέων, and once about man: μεδέοντα κάτω); μητίετα: I,2,1,103 (PG 37,530); ὑψιμέδων, fourteen times.

ὄργανόν εἰμι θεοῖο, καὶ εὐκρέτοις μελέεσσιν
 ὕμνον ἄνακτι φέρω, τῷ πᾶν ὑποτρομέει.
 μέλπω δ' οὐ Τροίην, οὐκ εὐπλοον οἷα τις Ἀργώ,
 οὐδὲ συνὸς κεφαλὴν, οὐ πολὺν Ἡρακλέα,
 οὐ γῆς εὐρέα κύκλα ὅπως πελάγεσσιν ἄρηεν,
 οὐκ αὐγὰς λιθάκων, οὐ δρόμον οὐρανίων·
 οὐδὲ πόθων μέλπω μανίην, καὶ κάλλος ἐφήβων,
 οἷσι λύρη μαλακὸν κρούετ' ἀπὸ προτέρων.
 μέλπω δ' ὑψιμέδοντα (!) θεὸν μέγαν, ἡδὲ φαεινῆς
 εἰς ἓν ἀγειρομένης λάμπιν ἐμῆς τριάδος.

I am an instrument of God, and with well-sounding phrases
 I offer a hymn to the Lord, before whom everything trembles.
 I do not celebrate Troy with song, nor Argo, good for sailing, as
 someone did,
 nor the head of the boar, nor Heracles, much talked-of,
 nor how the broad cycles of the earth are closely fixed to the seas,
 nor the gleam of gems, nor the orbit of the stars;
 I do not celebrate the madness of love and the beauty of ephebes
 for whom the lyre of men of former times was softly struck.
 I celebrate the great God ruling on high, and the shining
 of my brilliant Triad, gathered together in one (godhead).¹⁵

Although mythology, natural phenomena, and earthly love are not the main subjects of Gregory's poetry, they are not absent in it either. To illustrate this, we can limit ourselves to some of the themes from the classical authors which he repudiates in the above fragment but which elsewhere he exactly does adopt: the Trojan cycle (Μέλπω δ' οὐ Τροίην) is omnipresent; the myth of Jason and Medea (οὐκ εὐπλοον Ἀργώ) is related in II,2,3, vv. 54-9; the story of Meleager (οὐδὲ συνὸς κεφαλὴν) is alluded to in I,2,15, vv. 83-4 (PG 37,772) and II,2,4, v. 123 (PG 37,1514); Heracles (οὐ πολὺν Ἡρακλέα) is often mentioned and the well-known story of him on the crossroads inspired several passages. Finally, the mentioning of natural curiosities is also very frequent with Gregory, notably on the subject of stones (οὐκ αὐγὰς λιθάκων). Not only does he mention the proverbial magnets and pearls, but even a mating and procreating sort of stones; he denotes his source for this as λίθων ἐπιύτορες ἄνδρες.¹⁶ Further examples of natural

¹⁵ Εἰς τὴν ἐν ταῖς νηστεαῖς σιωπῇν, II,1,34, vv. 69-78 (PG 37,1312-1313). L. Sternbach, "Les influences alexandrines et de l'époque suivante chez Grégoire de Nazianze", *Bulletin international de l'Académie Polonaise des Sciences et des Lettres. Classe de philologie* 1922 (Krakau 1926) 62-63, considered all these verses as allusions to specific, mainly Hellenistic, poems but Wyß 1983 (n.2) 850 is right in limiting the identifications to the *Iliad*, Apollonius' *Argonautica* and Aratus' *Phaenomena*.

¹⁶ I,2,1, vv. 244-6 (PG 37,541). The story is quoted by the adherents of marriage as a proof of the universality of marriage and sexual urge. Theophrastus tells a similar story in Περὶ λίθων 5.

curiosities are some peculiarities about animals Gregory draws from the two Oppians and from Nicander.¹⁷

To return to Trojan mythology: the fact that Homer's presence in Gregory's hexameters is not merely formal can be illustrated with a remarkable passage from the epistolary poem *From Nicobulus to His Son*, mentioned above (n. 9). In a kind of eulogy on the μῦθοι he interprets two passages from the *Odyssey* allegorically: the magic potions given to Ulysses and Helen symbolize for him the power of the word (λόγος and μῦθος respectively):

οἶδα δὲ Πομποῦ
φάρμακον, ὥς λόγος ἦεν, ὃν ἐρχομένῳ μετὰ Κίρκῃν
Λαρτιάδῃ πόρε δῶρόν, ὅπως κε σύεσσιν ἀρήξει
οἷς ἐτάροις, μηδ' αὐτὸς ἔδοι συοθρέμματα φορβήν.
μῦθον καὶ Πολύδαμνα κεράσσατο, Θῶνος ἄκοιτις,
Αἰγυπτίῃ, δῶκεν δ' Ἑλένη ξεινήϊον ἐσθλόν,
νηπενθές τ', ἄχολόν τε, κακῶν ἐπὶ λήθον ἀπάντων.

I know that the drug of Hermes (who escorts the souls of the dead) was the *logos*. He gave it as a present to the son of Laertes on his way to Circe, in order that he might help his friends, changed into swine, and avoid to eat himself swine fodder. It was the *mythos* as well which the Egyptian Polydamna, Thon's wife, mixed; she gave it to Helen as a noble host's gift, banishing sorrow and anger, causing all evil to be forgotten.¹⁸

C. Quotations and allusions without mention of the source

In the previous example Homer is not just the source Gregory draws his image or his story from; specific passages are alluded to, and even literally quoted: the last verse is identical with *Od.* 4,221, and the two preceding ones are clearly inspired by *Od.* 4,228-9.

Most of the more or less literal quotations from classical poets are less eye-catching than these verses, where one is supposed to know the Homeric original in order to understand Gregory's text. On other occasions, when the poet does not say or suggest that he is quoting, there is a considerable chance that quotations

¹⁷ E.g. about an enormous fish, the ἔχενης, able to contain a whole ship (*I,2,2*, v. 229; PG 37,596; see Oppian *Halieutica* A,212-43), or about a sort of viper which comes into the world by devouring its mother from inside (*II,2,5*, vv. 112-113; PG 37,1529-30; see Nicander *Theriaca* 132-4, and already Herodotus 3,109).

¹⁸ *II,2,5*, vv. 196-202 (PG 37,1535-6). The episodes stem from *Od.* 10,275-308 (the meeting of Hermes and Ulysses) and *Od.* 4,220-32 (Helen using the *νηπενθής*). Gregory's allegorical interpretation is not original: Plutarch and Himerius as well consider the magic potions as images of eloquence (respectively the persuading and consoling powers of the word).

escape the reader's attention. Usually identification of the source is not necessary for understanding the text, however (although of course it may be interesting for textual criticism), and it seldom enriches the interpretation. This is so in cases where Gregory just adopts an appreciated formula, image or idea; several of these he uses more than once, much as he often repeats entire verses or passages from his own poems (see n. 5).

Gregory was no Alexandrian *poeta doctus*: no gloss- or variant-hunting with him. He quotes literally or freely, and apparently by heart. His favourite sources seem to be Homer, Hesiod, the tragedians (especially Euripides), Callimachus, the Monostichs of Menander, and the epigrammatic tradition (especially the poets of Meleager's Στέφανος from the first century B.C.).

Among the immense bulk of quotations, some, nevertheless, are not merely formal, but (may) also evoke connotations, thereby giving the reading an extra dimension. It is possible, for instance, that *a non-mentioned figure serves as an exemplar*, as is the case in the Ὑποθήκαι παρθένους. In this poem Gregory refers to the story of Elijah and the widow of Zarephath (1 Kgs. 17) in a passage that is at the same time reminiscent of Callimachus' Hecale,¹⁹ thus implicitly combining both examples of hospitality. Another instance is to be found in the poem Παρθενῆς ἔπαινος: there the advocates of marriage mention a double advantage of this institution:

Χάρμα μέγ' εὐμενέεσσιν, ἄχος δέ τε δυσμενέεσσι.²⁰

This formula appears almost literally in the famous passage of the sixth book of the Odyssey where Ulysses wishes Nausicaa a good husband.²¹

The same technique is also used at times *to criticise or to approve of an unmentioned author*, e.g. in the poem just mentioned: in her answer to the advocates of marriage the personified παρθενῆ, too, uses a construction taken from the Odyssey, but she completely inverts its tenor:

βουλοίμην κεν ἄτιμος ἐν ἀνθρώποισιν ἐοῦσα,
τυτθὸν ἐν οὐρανίοισιν ἔχειν κλέος αἰὲν ἐοῦσιν
ἢ πάντων κρατέουσα, θεοῦ πίπτειν ἀπάνευθεν.

¹⁹ I,2,2, vv. 172-6 (PG 37,592). Callimachus' Ἠκάλη, which deals with an old woman of the same name who offers hospitality to Theseus, is only partially preserved. The fragments 251,1 and 263,3 (Pfeiffer) are echoed in Gregory's verses.

²⁰ I,2,1, v. 264 (PG 37,542).

²¹ Od. 6,184-5.

I'd rather be dishonoured among men,
 having some fame among the eternal celestials,
 than to rule over all, falling away from God.²²

Homer made Achilles complain to Ulysses:

βουλοίμην κ' ἐπάρουρος ἐὼν θητευέμεν ἄλλω,
 ἄνδρι παρ' ἀκλήρῳ, ὃ μὴ βίωτος πολὺς εἴη,
 ἢ πᾶσιν νεκύεσσι καταφθιμένοισιν ἀνάσσειν.

I'd rather be another's hired hand
 working for some poor man who owns no land
 but pays his rent from what scant gains he gets,
 than to rule over all whom death has crushed.²³

Conversely, Gregory approves of and adopts Theognis' saying that reliable friends cannot possibly be made around the mixing vessel.²⁴

About the implicit presence of the Greek poets in Gregory Nazianzen's verse, one can conclude that his general attitude is at least receptive.²⁵ When he places the λόγοι in the service of Christ, as we have heard him say, the Greek poetic tradition is manifestly included. He is familiar with it, makes allusions to it, imitates it, quotes it. The next question to ask ourselves is whether his explicit appreciation is equally positive.

EXPLICIT PRESENCE OF THE GREEK POETS

A. Quotations and allusions with mention of the source

Instances of Gregory quoting a verse, adopting an expression, telling a curiosity, or alluding to a myth while mentioning his source are less frequent.

The way a source is indicated is extremely variable: sometimes an author is named, but generally the reference is much vaguer, making the identification of several quotations problematic or

²² I,2,1, vv. 374-6 (PG 37,550).

²³ *Od.* 11,489-91. Translation by A. Mandelbaum, *The Odyssey of Homer* (Berkeley 1990).

²⁴ Γνωμολογία τετραστίχος, I,2,33, vv. 177-8 (PG 37,941); Theognis 593-4 (see H.L. Davids, *De gnomologieën van sint Gregorius van Nazianze* [Nijmegen-Amsterdam 1940] 115).

²⁵ Certainly if one compares it, for example, with Origen, who strongly influenced Gregory in other respects: Origen never quotes Greek poets at all, see I. Ševčenko, "A Shadow Outline of Virtue: the Classical Heritage of Greek Christian Literature (second to seventh Century)", in *Age of Spirituality: A Symposium* ed. K. Weitzmann (New York 1980) 56.

even impossible. Probably in some cases the origin was doubtful for Gregory himself as well. It is often difficult to determine whether he had read the original texts or whether he knew certain works or passages only through anthologies, doxographies, and the like. He seems to have got quite a lot of quotations and apophthegms from Plutarch, for instance.

The vaguest indications that he found his inspiration elsewhere, are expressions such as ὡς ἐνέπουσιν, ὡς ἀκούω/ἀκούομεν, ὄντως, πυνθάνομ' ὡς. Especially the first two expressions generally do not imply a quotation from a specific author: they often concern a τόπος from popular philosophy or a well-known fact or story; and they also regularly accompany the description of natural phenomena (as with the mating stones mentioned above). Sometimes, though, they refer to demonstrable models, from Hesiod, Sophocles, Menander, Aristophanes.²⁶ ὄντως points to the appropriateness of the quotation; the other expressions may indicate distancing or doubt about the reliability of the source, but sometimes they introduce a biblical story or quotation as well.²⁷

A more specific indication is to be found in expressions such as οἱ πάλαι, αἱ παλαιαὶ βίβλοι, οἱ Ἕλληνες, referring to the classical tradition as a whole. Elsewhere Gregory indicates his source by naming a group, a philosophical school, or a genre, as in the long poem Περὶ ἀρετῆς: there he quotes for instance six iambic trimeters, mentioning as their author Στωικῶν τῶν φιλτάτων τις;²⁸ and on four occasions he states that he is quoting from "the tragedy": twice he clearly does not know the passage at first hand,²⁹ twice the quotations seem to be slightly ironical:

κάπροι δ' ὅπως θήγοντες ἀγρίαν γένυν
(ὡς ἂν μμήσομαι τι τῆς τραγῳδίας),
λοξὸν βλέποντες, ἐμπύροις τοῖς ὄμμασι,
συνῆπτον.

²⁶ Ὡς ἐνέπουσιν e.g. I,2,29 v. 115 (PG 37,892): inspired by Hesiod *Theogony* 570-89 and *Works and Days* 55-6 and 703-5; ὡς ἀκούομεν e.g. I,2,10 v. 686 (PG 37,729): Sophocles fr. 854 N² = 940 Radt; ὄντως e.g. II,1,11 v. 991 (PG 37,1097): Menander *Monostichs* 36J = 50M; πυνθάνομ' ὡς e.g. I,2,29 v. 61 (PG 37,889): Aristophanes *Ec.* 1072-3.

²⁷ Ὡς ἐνέπουσιν e.g. II,1,1 v. 368 (PG 37,997): the destruction of Jericho (Josh. 6); ἀκούομεν e.g. *Or.* 22,1 (PG 35,1132): quotations concerning the peace of God (Phil. 4,7; 2 Cor. 13,11; Eph. 2,14); (ὅταν) ἀκούω e.g. *Or.* 9,2 (PG 35,820-1): the story of the centurion (Matt. 8,5-13); πυνθάνομ' ὡς e.g. II,1,1 v. 393 (PG 37,999): the Pharisee and the publican (Luke 18,9-14).

If I may imitate tragic language somewhat,
they sharpened their fierce tusks like boars,
looked cross-eyed with fiery glance,
and joined battle,³⁰

and

ὦ πόλις πόλις,
ἴν' ἐκβοήσω καὶ τι καὶ τραγωδικόν.

Alas, poor city,
if I may indulge in tragic exclamation.³¹

Finally, Gregory sporadically names the author he is quoting. In the following passage he successively denounces statements by Theognis and Homer, authors whom elsewhere he cites assentingly but anonymously, as we have seen.

ληρεὶ δέ μοι Θεόγνις ὥς λῆρον πλατύν,
κηρμινούς προτιμῶν τῆς ἀπορίας καὶ βυθοῦς,
κακῶς τε Κύρνω νομοθετῶν εἰς χρήματα.
"Ὅμηρε καὶ σὺ, πῶς τοσοῦτον ἀστάτῳ
πράγματι νέμεις, ὥστε φράσαι που τῶν ἐπῶν,
ὀπηδὸν εἶναι τὴν ἀρετὴν τῶν χρημάτων;
φησὶν· Τόδ' εἶπον αὐτός οὐχ οὕτως ἔχων,
γελῶν δὲ τοὺς ἔχοντας οὕτως ἀθλίως.

Theognis speaks foolishly, futile nonsense,
as he prefers the crags and the abyss to poverty,
preaching to Cyrnus infamous rules about possession.
And even you, Homer, how can you attach such great importance
to an unsteady good, so as to state somewhere in your verses:
virtue is the attendant of wealth ?
He says: "I said that not as my own opinion,
but deriding those who hold that shameful view".³²

The verses dealing with Homer are noteworthy for several reasons. First of all, Gregory is mistaken about his target: the statement objected to does not appear in Homer but in Hesiod. The

²⁸ I,2,10 vv. 604-611 (PG 37,724). Werhahn 1953 (n. 5) 86-8, is inclined to attribute the fragment to Cleanthes.

²⁹ I,2,10, vv. 276-9 (PG 37,700): an anecdote about Diogenes citing a Euripidean verse derisively (the same anecdote in Diogenes Laertius 6,55); and ib. v. 585, announcing two trimeters of the gnomic poet Chares.

³⁰ II,1,11 vv. 1804-1807 (PG 37,1155-6). 1804 = Euripides *Ph.* 1380.

³¹ II,1,12, vv. 134-5 (PG 37,1176). 134 = Sophocles *OT* 629.

³² I,2,10, vv. 393-400 (PG 37,708-709). Verse 394 alludes to Theognis 175-6, verse 398 goes back to Hesiod (!) *Works and Days* 313.

error, not the only one in its kind, proves that Gregory quotes by heart. What is more, the attack allows Homer an opportunity for apology: he asserts that he himself does not approve of the idea, and in the following verses he refers to the example of the naked Ulysses facing Nausicaa (an episode already mentioned above), as evidence that his poetry is in fact a eulogy on virtue. Eventually, Homer comes out on top in this fictitious discussion.

Naturally, the possibility of identifying a quotation is connected with the degree of specificity in mentioning the source. Gregory's free and sometimes erroneous way of quoting incites to caution, however, when attributing fragments only preserved with him. This is the case with the fragments 11a-b (Diehl) of the Cynic poet Cercidas (third century B.C.): nine verses in all are attributed to him on the basis of Gregory's verse

ὁρθῶς λέγει που Κερκιδᾶς ὁ φίλτατος.

Probably no more than a pun appearing in both 'fragments'³³ literally derives from Cercidas.

It should be clear that Gregory's *appreciation* in his explicit quotations varies more than in the implicit ones. His vague wording (ὡς ἐνέπουσι and the like) can either refer to an authority (the Bible, for instance), or express caution or distancing. And whereas he very often adopts expressions or verses from tragedy without mention, there is a touch of irony in his explicit quotations. Those rare instances when Gregory names an author as his source can be both approving (Cercidas) and polemical (Theognis and Homer).

Of course, such variability of tone has to do with the fact that so far we have only treated quotations: approval or disapproval of an author's specific expression, gnome or idea does not imply a similar judgment on that author, let alone on Greek literature as a whole.

B. General pronouncements about Greek authors

On several occasions, Gregory passes more general judgments on Greek literature, e.g. in his poem Περὶ ἀρετῆς, from which we have also drawn most of the quotations with a more or less precise indication of their sources. In this poem of about 1,000 trimeters Gre-

³³ Fragments: I,2,8, vv. 96-8 (PG 37,656) and I,2,10, vv. 595-600 (PG 37,723); the verse mentioning Cercidas is I,2,10, v. 598. The best treatment of this issue is to be found in Werhahn 1953 (n. 5) 75-85.

gory incites a young man to ἀρετή. After an extensive introduction on the real mission of man (elevation towards God), he deals with four aspects of virtue (εὐτέλεια, ἐγκράτεια, ἀνδρεία and σωφροσύνη), in each case comparing the pronouncements of both Greeks and Christians on the subject. The poem is teeming with explicit quotations and examples from pagan and sacred history. It goes without saying that the Christians outrank the Greeks by far.

In his introduction Gregory advises the young man to look at all perishable earthly goods in perspective, and to be as independent as possible towards them. His series of superfluous items, all of which are introduced by καὶν,³⁴ includes:

πνέης δὲ θυμὸν ἐν δίκαις Δημοσθένους,
εἴκη δέ σοι Λυκοῦργος ἢ Σόλων νόμοις·
καὶν τὴν Ὅμηρου μοῦσαν ἐν στέροισι ἔχης,
καὶν τὴν Πλάτωνος γλῶσσαν, ἢ μελισταγῆς
ἔστι τε καὶ νομίζειτ' ἀνθρώπων γένει· κτλ.

Even if in court you breathe forth the spirit of Demosthenes,
and in legislation you surpass Lycurgus or Solon;
even if you have Homer's muse in your breast,
even if you have Plato's tongue, sweet as dropped honey
in the eyes of mankind and in actual fact, ... (vv. 40-4; PG 37,683-4).

And before actually comparing the Greeks with 'us', he wonders if one can find among the Greeks any trace of wisdom at all, for how could someone be called 'wise' if he denies the existence of the one God? Still, some of them do put virtue in the first place, and Gregory is prepared to cite them:

Μεμνήσομαι δέ, δείγματος χάριν, τινῶν,
ὡς ἂν μάθης κἀνθένδε τὴν ἀρετὴν, ὅσα
ῥόδ' ἐξ ἀκανθῶν, ὡς λέγουσι, συλλέγων,
ἐκ τῶν ἀπίστων μανθάνων τὰ κρείσσονα.

I will mention some of them, as examples,
so that you might learn virtue from them also,
picking the roses amongst the thorns, as the saying goes,
and learning the best from the faithless (vv. 214-7; PG 37,695).

But he also points to risks, for Greek literature offers more thorns than roses:

Μήτ' οὖν ἐκεῖνα προσδέχου τὰ μὴ καλὰ
βίβλων παλαιῶν, ὧγαθ', αἷς ἐνετράφης.

³⁴ Compare with Paul's καὶ ἐάν ... (1 Cor. 13,1-3).

Do not accept, my good friend, the wrong things
from the old books in which you have been trained (vv. 367-8; PG
37,706-707).

He then gives a whole series of dismissing quotations, including the ones from Theognis and Homer (sic) mentioned above. Finally, Gregory decides to change his tack, and consider his own, Christian, laws:

Τί μοι ξένων μύθων τε καὶ διδαγμάτων;
αὐτοὺς σκόπει μοι τοὺς ἐμοὺς ἤδη νόμους.

Why do I need those foreign words and lessons?
Look at the following instructions of my own (vv. 412-3; PG
37,710).

We find the same tendency in a totally different context, in the poem Εἰς ἑαυτὸν καὶ περὶ ἐπισκόπων (II,1,12), a long attack against unworthy bishops, written in the embitterment following his term of office in Constantinople. Among other things he denounces the fact that completely unprepared and illiterate men suddenly become bishops. Replying to the objection that the Apostles and Evangelists were simple fishermen and publicans, Gregory admits that eloquence is not really required as long as the content is orthodox:

οὐδὲν τὸ κομψόν, τοῖς θέλουσι δώσομεν.
μή μοι τὰ Σέξτου μηδὲ Πύρρωνος πλέκε·
Χρύσιππος ἔρροι, μακράν ὁ Σταγειρίτης.
μηδὲ Πλάτωνος στέργε τὴν εὐγλωττίαν.
ῥῖπον τὸ κάλλος, ὧν τὰ δόγματ' ἀποστρέφῃ.
ἐμφιλοσόφει τῇ εὐτελείᾳ τοῦ λόγου.
ἡμῖν ἀρέσκεις, κἂν ἀπαιδεύτως λαλῇς.

Let those who like that sort of thing have ornament, it counts for nothing.

Don't entangle me in the language of a Sextus or a Pyrrho:

deuce take Chrysippus, and let the Stagirite stay far away:

don't attempt to imitate the smooth style of Plato.

If you disapprove of a person's ideas, reject his ornamental style as well.

Do your philosophizing in simple language, and,

however untutored your style, you will satisfy me (vv. 302-308; PG
37,1188).

This strong dissociation from the formal elegance of the Greek authors recalls those statements about the λόγοι quoted above in connection with Gregory's education. It does not imply absolute rejection, though. On the contrary, the last poem, against the unworthy bishops, argues for the legitimacy of a literary education, if not the advisability or even necessity.

Elsewhere, however, Gregory does reject the pagan λόγοι more radically, in this concise expression:

χωρίς τὰ τῶν ἔξωθεν τῶν τ' ἐμῶν λόγων.³⁵

And in the poem II,1,34, also mentioned above (in which he opposes his own themes to those of the pagan poets), he expresses his aversion for pagan books even more vigorously:

θείοις μὲν λογίοισιν ἐμὸν νόον ἀγνὸν ἔτευξα,
 γράμματος ἔξ ἱεροῦ πνεῦμ' ἀναμαξάμενος,
 οἷς βίβλων τοπάροιθε πικρὴν ἐξέπτυν ἄλμην,
 κάλλος ἐπιπλάστοις χρώμασι λαμπόμενον.

I purified my mind with divine words,
 having obtained an impression of the Spirit from the Holy Scripture;
 for this purpose I formerly spat out the bitter brine of the (pagan) books,
 beauty shining with false colours (vv. 157-60; PG 37,1318).

Occasionally we can read passages of the same tenor in Gregory's prose as well.³⁶ Nevertheless, this cannot be his real view; the mainly implicit indications given above should be sufficiently convincing. Moreover, to the attentive reader the way Gregory expresses his 'aversion' shows that at least he is exaggerating: in the last excerpt, for instance, he uses images from pagan diatribe;³⁷ in a letter to Gregory of Nyssa he reproaches his colleague for having again taken up the 'salty' (compare πικρὴν ἄλμην in the last passage) profane books, presenting this reproach with an allusion to Hesiod and a quotation from Euripides;³⁸ and in a letter to Adamantius he complains that the latter asked him profane instead of sacred books, yet shows himself prepared to look if he can still find those books among the moths, ... and again he alludes to Hesiod.³⁹ Should we listen to the content, then, or look at the form?

³⁵ II,1,11, v. 1241 (PG 37,1114).

³⁶ E.g. *Or.* 16,2 (PG 35,936), in a reminiscence of 1 Cor. 1,17-2,5 (where Paul expresses his suspicion of human wisdom): Σοφία πρώτη, σοφίας ὑπεροχὴν τῆς ἐν λόγῳ κειμένης, καὶ στοφαῖς λέξεων, καὶ ταῖς κιβδήλοις καὶ περιτταῖς ἀντιθέσεσιν ... Οὐ γὰρ ὁ ἐν λόγῳ σοφός, οὗτος ἐμοὶ σοφός.

³⁷ See M. Kertsch, *Bildersprache bei Gregor von Nazianz. Ein Beitrag zur spätantiken Rhetorik und Popularphilosophie* (Graz 1978) 90-2.

³⁸ *Ep.* 11,3-4 (PG 37,41.44).

³⁹ *Ep.* 235,1-4 (PG 37,377.380).

CONCLUSION

Considering all these, sometimes contradictory, elements, I think the best summary is a passage from Gregory's own funeral oration for his friend Basil:

Οἶμαι δὲ πᾶσιν ἀνωμολογῆσθαι τὸν νοῦν ἐχόντων, παιδευσιν τῶν παρ' ἡμῖν ἀγαθῶν εἶναι τὸ πρῶτον· οὐ ταύτην μόνην τὴν εὐγενεστέραν, καὶ ἡμετέραν, ἢ πᾶν τὸ ἐν λόγοις κομῶν καὶ φιλότιμον ἀτιμάζουσα, μόνης ἔχεται τῆς σωτηρίας, καὶ τοῦ κάλλους τῶν νοουμένων· ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν ἔξωθεν, ἣν οἱ πολλοὶ Χριστιανῶν διαπτύουσιν, ὡς ἐπιβουλον καὶ σφαλεράν, καὶ θεοῦ πόρρω βάλλουσαν, κακῶς εἰδότες. Ὡσπερ γὰρ οὐρανὸν καὶ γῆν καὶ ἀέρα καὶ ὅσα τούτων, οὐκ ἐπειδὴ κακῶς τινες ἐξειλήφασιν ἀντὶ θεοῦ τὰ τοῦ θεοῦ σέβοντες, διὰ τοῦτο περιφρονητέον· ἀλλ' ὅσον χρῆσιμον αὐτῶν καρπούμενοι πρὸς τε ζωὴν καὶ ἀπόλαυσιν, ὅσον ἐπικίνδυνον διαφεύγομεν· ... Οὐκ οὖν ἀτιμαστέον τὴν παιδευσιν, ὅτι τοῦτο δοκεῖ τισιν· ἀλλὰ σκαιοὺς καὶ ἀπαιδεύτους ὑποληπτέον τοὺς οὕτως ἔχοντας, οἳ βούλονται ἂν ἅπαντας εἶναι καθ' ἑαυτούς, ἵν' ἐν τῷ κοινῷ τὸ κατ' αὐτοὺς κρύπτηται, καὶ τοὺς τῆς ἀπαιδευσίας ἐλέγχους διαδιδράσκωσιν.

I take it that all sensible men are agreed upon the fact that παιδεία is the foremost of our advantages, and that not alone the more noble form of it, our own, which holds all ambitious subtlety of language in contempt, clinging only to salvation and to the beauty of the objects contemplated. I mean too that external culture which many Christians in their short-sightedness spurn as a treacherous and insidious thing which withdraws us far from God. We ought not to despise the firmament, earth and air and all these things because men have perverted them, worshipping instead of God the works of God; but rather to use them in so far as they are useful for our life and for our pleasure, avoiding what is dangerous; (...). We are not then to cast aspersions on παιδεία because it pleases some to do so; rather are we to reckon such critics boorish and untutored, men who would have everyone like themselves in order that in the common levelling their own lack of culture would pass unnoticed.⁴⁰

This position is in agreement with the one adopted by Basil himself in his treatise on the use of pagan literature. It has been called 'prudent realism'.⁴¹ For Gregory's explicit statements, such a characterization may be satisfactory; but with regard to his poetical practice, I would rather speak even of positive prejudice.

The question remains why Gregory's explicit judgments are so cautious and even unstable. There are no systematic differences

⁴⁰ Or. 43,11 (PG 36,508-509). Translation by Meehan 1943 (n. 3) 259. Note that the two underlined terms, the second of which Gregory uses to denote the attitude of short-sighted Christians, appeared also in the quoted fragments from II,1,12 and II,1, 34. There Gregory expressed his own (?) opinion.

⁴¹ Meehan 1943 (n. 3) 261.

according to the genre practised (he happens to be positive and negative in prose as well as in poetry), the classical author dealt with, or the period of life he is writing in. Why then did he not keep to the above, clear position? The question concerns not only his attitude towards the Greek poetic tradition: an inquiry into his position towards rhetoric and classical philosophy, other domains of the pagan παιδείσεις, leads to similar observations.⁴²

The problem has been dealt with quite often, and interpretations are rather divergent: some state that Gregory must have felt an affinity with both the Greek tradition and Christianity, at the same time realizing that both were fundamentally incompatible; others consider his sporadic contempt for the Greek λόγοι as literary coquetry, and think him very consistent both intellectually and spiritually.⁴³

It seems to me that the sporadic rejection of Greek culture is partially conventional indeed, but calling it just literary coquetry is too easy. On the other hand, I do not believe that the two traditions really seemed incompatible to Gregory himself. The variable attitude in his work does however prove that the adoption of the Greek literary heritage into Christian culture was not yet undisputed. We can deduce this, for example, from the poems II,1,39, where Gregory engages in a polemic about his right to write verses, and II,1,12, where he breaks a lance for (pagan) literacy as an advantage for future bishops, apparently against criticism. The same discussion is reflected very emphatically in the funeral oration for Basil, as we have seen. In my opinion, Gregory himself was convinced of the value of the λόγοι and the possibility or even necessity of integrating them with Christianity; in order to convince others, though, he felt forced to engage in a sort of continual give-and-take.⁴⁴

⁴² See R.R. Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus. Rhetor and Philosopher* (Oxford 1969) 156-75: "Conscious Attitudes towards Rhetoric and Philosophy in the Writings of Gregory of Nazianzus".

⁴³ Respectively Ruether 1969 (n. 42) 162 and Camelot 1966 (n. 6) 23.

⁴⁴ I want to express my gratitude to my colleague and friend Bart Eeckhout for having revised the English version of this text.

THE VISION OF DOROTHEUS

by

JAN N. BREMMER

In 1952 some dozens of papyri were found in the neighbourhood of Dishna in Upper-Egypt, not far from Nag Hammadi, where the famous Coptic library was discovered. In the course of the following years the majority of these papyri arrived in the hands of Martin Bodmer, a well-known Swiss collector, via a Cypriote dealer in antiquities, Phokion Tano. Unlike the predominantly Gnostic Nag Hammadi library, these papyri contained both pagan Greek texts, such as fragments of the Iliad and the comedies of Menander, and Christian papyri, such as various Old and New Testament texts in Coptic, fragments of the Gospels (P66 and P75), Greek apocrypha and the works of Melito of Sardis, etc. Since the collection also comprised a number of copies of letters of abbots of the nearby situated Pachomian monastery, it has been suggested that this collection, like the one of Nag Hammadi, was part of a monastic library.¹ In view of its ascetic character such a suggestion is possible in the case of the Gnostic library, but it is totally improbable for a collection containing Menander. For that reason it seems safer to assume that the monastery had copied these writings for others, as we know that the Pachomian monks had to work for a living.² Egyptian monks were not really that frivolous!

In 1984 an equipe of Geneva published the first nine pages of Papyrus Bodmer 29, a poem of 343 epic hexameters, called *The Vision of Dorotheus* by the superscription.³ The editio princeps is

¹ For this suggestion and the story of the discovery see now James M. Robinson, *The Story of the Bodmer Papyri, the First Christian Monastery Library* (Nashville 1987).

² Cf. Hieronymus, in A. Boon, *Pachomiana Latina* (Louvain 1932) 7-8; *Historia Lausiaca* 32 Bartelink. For the Pachomians' reading and producing of books see now C. Scholten, "Die Nag-Hammadi-Texte als Buchbesitz der Pachomianer", *JbAC* 31 (1988) 144-72; H. Holze, "Schrifterfahrung und Christusbekenntnis im pachomianischen Mönchtum", *Theologische Zeitschrift* 49 (1993) 54-65.

³ A. Hurst—O. Reverdin—J. Rudhardt, *Papyrus Bodmer XXIX, Vision de Dorotheos* (Cologny-Genève 1984). The best review is by E. Livrea, *Gnomon* 58 (1986) 687-711, reprinted in his *Studia Hellenistica* II (Firenze 1991) 319-50.

not a philological or historical milestone, but the editors deserve our gratitude for their decision to prefer a speedy publication over a lengthy delay. Fortunately, our compatriots Kessels and Van der Horst published in 1987 a revised text with English translation and a short commentary, which may presently be considered the standard.⁴ In my contribution I will first give a summary of the vision, and subsequently discuss the date, name, milieu, and intention of the author.

1. THE VISION OF DOROTHEUS

After the protagonist of the vision, whom I will provisionally call Dorotheus (see below), has thanked God (1-3), he relates how he received a vision when he was sitting in the imperial palace at noon—the time for an epiphany in antiquity.⁵ He sees himself standing in the forecourt of the palace of God, whom he views in full glory (10-16). Very abruptly the picture changes and Dorotheus tells how he was sitting as *ostiarius* (gatekeeper) in the middle of the commanders, *praepositi*, of the divine bodyguard, in the company of a (the?) *domesticus* (administrator) of God (16-18). In the following, only very fragmentarily surviving passage Christ appears (19) with Gabriel (24), the only angel who is mentioned by name. The protagonist receives a great privilege, as he is changed “in form and in stature” (19-41). He now becomes *tiro* (recruit) near the *biarchoi*, a lower rank in the imperial bodyguard (42-52).

Again, there follows a damaged passage, in which the protagonist three times commits an offence. Firstly he fails to pay the honour due to God, at which he is again reduced to the rank of an *ostiarius* (56, 120, 131), a function he does not dutifully carry out (61, 132); in addition, he seems to be back in his old body.

⁴ A.H.M. Kessels—P.W. van der Horst, “The Vision of Dorotheus (Pap. Bodmer 29)”, *VC* 41 (1987) 313-59; I quote from this text and translation, if with some minor changes. Note also the list of *errata* supplied by E. Livrea, “Ancora sulla ‘Visione’ di Doroteo”, *Eikasmos. Quaderni Bolognesi di Filologia Classica* 1 (1990) 183-90, esp. 184-5.

⁵ Livrea (n. 3) 707 observes that “l’ora meridiana è un momento critico, spesso scelto dalla divinità per manifestarsi all’uomo” and presents important parallels; add *Cosmas et Damian* 18,98-9 Deubner; *Vita S. Theod. Syc.* 16 Festugière; R. Caillois, “Les démons de midi”, *Revue de l’Histoire des Religions* 115 (1937) 142-73 and 116 (1937) 54-83.143-86; J.B. Friedman, “Euridice, Heurodis and the Noon-Day Demon”, *Speculum* 41 (1966) 22-9; N.J. Perella, *Midday in Italian Literature* (Princeton 1979; with an excellent bibliography); W. Speyer, *Frühes Christentum im antiken Strahlungsfeld* (Tübingen 1989) 340-52. It is a topos that a vision is received in a sitting position, cf. Hermas *Visio* 5,1; Athanasius *V.Ant.* 82.84 Bartelink; *Historia Lausiaca* 4,4 Bartelink; E. Peterson, *Frühkirche, Judentum und Gnosis* (Freiburg 1959) 272-3.

Secondly, he slanders the *domesticus*, and, finally, he tries to mislead Christ in the presence of his Father (53-95). These trespasses are followed by a moment of regret and self-reflection (96-109), but he receives short shrift by Christ, who has him thrown into prison (96-142).

Here an enraged Christ orders him to be whipped until his bones become visible. But Dorotheus perseveres and, despite it all, he is restored in his function of *ostiarius* (143-67). For this firm beating God thanks Christ and Gabriel (168-81), both of whom now call Dorotheus before God's face. At first, God wants to send him away, but Christ and Gabriel put in a word for him and maintain him in his position (182-97). Dorotheus has another, unfortunately unclear, request, which results in his washing himself. Then God asks him whether he really wants to stand near the gate. When Dorotheus assents, he has to choose a guide and he chooses Andrew (198-226).

He is now called Andrew and is baptized by Jesus in order to put the seal upon his new name. Immediately, he assumes a new, much larger and younger figure. Christ addresses him in an encouraging way and points out that now, when exercising his duty, he has to demonstrate restrained courage (227-77). It seems—but the fragmentary state of the papyrus allows no certainty—that his courage is now put to the test. When Dorotheus has past this test, Christ himself positions him near the gate after having inspired him with courage. He is dressed in the uniform of the *scholae palatinae* of which he is clearly proud (297-337). Then he awakens from his vision and writes finally: "I prayed to be a messenger in the service of God Most High of all the things that he laid upon me. And in my heart he has laid songs of various kinds so as to keep guard and sing about the deeds of the righteous and also of Christ the Lord, year after year ever more delightful for a singer" (339-43).

2. AUTHOR AND DATE

When was this poem written and who was the author? Palaeographical criteria date the papyrus to the second half of the fourth century,⁶ but the *editio princeps*, followed by Kessels and Van der

⁶ R. Kasser—G. Cavallo—J. Van Haelst, "Nouvelle description du Codex des Visions", in *Papyrus Bodmer XXXVIII* ed. A. Carlini (Cologne-Genève 1991) 103-28, esp. 124 (Van Haelst). R. Kasser—G. Cavallo, "Description et datation du codex des Visions", in *editio princeps* (n. 3), Appendice, still dated it to the period around A.D. 400.

Horst (n. 4), suggests that the poem was written around the turn of the third and fourth century on the basis of the name of the poet, Dorotheus son of Quintus (l. 300 and the *subscriptio*: in the view of the *editio princeps* Quintus Smyrnaeus), and the mention of a Dorotheus who was martyred under Diocletian (Eusebius *HE* 8,1,4). Van Berchem seems to put the date a little later, as he compares the outfit of Dorotheus (cf. below) with that of the soldiers on Galerius' arch at Thessalonika.⁷ Finally, Enrico Livrea (n. 3) proposes a date between 342-362 on the basis of an eighth-century tradition that a 107 (!) year old Christian, Dorotheus, was martyred under Julian the Apostate.

Unfortunately, neither the literary and philological nor the historical arguments for these dates are convincing. Let us start with the first category. It must be noted that the exact translation of the final words of the *Vision* is debated. The last word, "singer", can belong both to Dorotheus and to Quintus, and it seems that in the title of a still unpublished fragment of the papyrus the word "Quintus" can be read; the poet even seems to speak with various literary *personae* in other, unpublished fragments of the same papyrus.⁸ Therefore, the whole problem of the authorship of the poem is still *sub iudice*. In any case, it is wrong to take the *subscriptio* as the principal point of departure for dating: in antiquity the author mentioned is not always the actual author—one only needs to think of the historical 'Schwindelautoren'. Moreover, an approach that takes its sole point of departure in the author's name may neglect other indications in the text.

A recent, philological approach is equally unconvincing. The American papyrologist Maccoull has argued for a Gnostic influence, since two epithets of God in the *Vision*, αὐτοφυής (12) and πανάτικτος (11), twice occur in the Nag Hammadi writings, the latter in the form ἀγέννητος.⁹ However, αὐτοφυής similarly occurs as a epithet of God in the well-known oracle of Klaros, which has now been found back in slightly expanded form in an inscription in the wall of Oenoanda. As Van den Broek showed in his inaugural lecture, this epithet has a clear Stoic background; πανάτικτος may be compared with ἀμήτωρ, 'without mother', as

⁷ D. van Berchem, "Des soldats chrétiens dans la garde impériale. Observations sur le texte de la *Vision de Dorotheos* (Papyrus Bodmer XXIX)", *Studii Clasice* 24 (1986) 155-63.

⁸ Cf. Th. Gelzer, "Zur Visio Dorothei; Pap. Bodmer 29", *MH* 45 (1988) 248-50.

⁹ L.S.B. Maccoull, "A Note on *panatiktos* in Visio Dorothei 11", *VC* 43 (1989) 293-6.

epithet of God in the same inscription.¹⁰ Moreover, its occurrence in Lactantius shows that the oracle must have been well-known outside Oenoanda. Consequently, the vocabulary of the oracle can hardly be used to demonstrate Gnostic influence in the *Vision*. Maccoull has also suggested that the prefix παν- of the hapax πανάτικτος is indicative of a late date, as it only occurs in fifth-century epic. Unfortunately, this suggestion is equally unhelpful, as various adjectives with the prefix παν- start to become popular in Imperial times. But that is as far as we can go.

As opposed to these literary and philological arguments, a historical approach can lay a more solid base for future attempts at dating the poem by focusing on the military terms. Admittedly, in his extensive review of the *editio princeps* the Italian philologist Livrea has called the many functionaries mentioned in the *Vision* "misteriosi personaggi", as if they were beings from a different planet. Yet, it is these functionaries who will provide us with an important key towards the dating, since various terms know of a certain *terminus post quem*.

Given the presence of the many soldiers in a military organisation close to God in his heavenly palace, it seems a reasonable working hypothesis that Dorotheus has transferred the organisation of the imperial guards to God's palace. Now if the poem dates from the period of Diocletian, we would expect to find a reflection of the contemporary organisation of the praetorian guards. On the other hand, if the poem is of a later date, we may expect to find the cavalry units which Constantine introduced after he disbanded the praetorians in 312.¹¹ And indeed, cavalry ranks are exactly what we find here, witness the well-known passage from Hieronymus *Contra Ioan. Hier.* 19 (PL 23,386):

Finge aliquem tribuniciae potestatis suo uitio regradatum per singula militiae equestris officia ad tironis uocabulum deuolutum: numquid ex tribuno statim fit tiro? non, sed ante primicerius, deinde senator, ducenarius, centenarius, biarchus, circitor, eques, dein tiro.

Hieronymus' pamphlet dates from 396, which still leaves a chronological gap of about eighty years. Can we be more precise?¹²

¹⁰ R. van den Broek, *Apollo in Asia. De orakels van Clarus en Didyma in de tweede en derde eeuw na Chr.* (Leiden 1981); see also S. Pricoco, "Per una storia dell'oracolo nella tarda antichità: Apollo Clario e Didimeo in Lattanzio", *Augustinianum* 29 (1989) 351-74. Inscription: *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* XXVII, 933.

¹¹ Cf. A.H.M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire* I (Oxford 1964) 52.

¹² In the now following paragraph I summarize the results of my "An Imperial

The presence of the *biarchus* (43) in the imperial *schola* is first attested in 327.¹³ The *domesticus* (18, 86-7), who is closely connected with the *praepositus* (86-7), is most likely the one of the *tribunus* of the *schola*. This *domesticus*, who is only rarely found in our sources, is first mentioned in 355 but only under Valentinian I (364-375) the rank became firmly institutionalized. The "*primicerius* of the Lord" (49) is perhaps modelled on the *primicerius notariorum*, who is first attested in 381. Ammianus (25,8,18), though, mentions a *primus inter notarios omnes* as early as 363, and Libanius' correspondence with Bassus suggests that the latter was *primicerius notariorum* in 358. However, the fact that those members of the *schola notariorum*, who were above the grade of *domestici et notarii*, became *clarissimi* after 367 perhaps rather points to the time of Valentinian I; the more so as Julian had greatly reduced the number of *notarii*. Finally, the end of the *Vision* mentions the *orarium* (322), a kind of cravat, which in its military meaning is only mentioned in a papyrus dated to the period A.D. 360-450. All indications, then, point to a date somewhere in the second half of the fourth century. This conclusion removes the ground for all speculations about the identity of the author which have been offered until now.

3. MILIEU AND SOCIAL POSITION

Despite our ignorance of the identity of the author, can we nevertheless say something about his milieu and social position? It is evident that the author knows Homer; one could even say that the poem is a Homeric cento.¹⁴ He also quotes Hesiod and, in the last line, the end of Apollonius of Rhodes' *Argonautica*. Although, then, he is not without culture, he also allows himself many epic licenses and prosodic mistakes, which we do not find in Quintus Smyrnaeus.¹⁵ The author also quotes a number of rare and unusual words, which are found in Hesychius,¹⁶ and uses uncommon

Palace Guard in Heaven: The Date of the Vision of Dorotheus", *ZPE* 75 (1988) 82-8. I refer to this study for all the sources of the ranks mentioned and the evaluation of the *Vision* for our knowledge of the Roman army.

¹³ Note that Livrea (n. 4) 189 n. 15, in his objections to my dating of the *Vision*, has not realized that the point at issue is not the *biarchus*' membership of the army but of the *schola palatina*. My dating has been accepted by Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity* (Madison 1992) 145 n. 129.

¹⁴ Cf. G. Agosti, "Alcuni omerismi nella 'Visio Dorothei' (P. Bodmer XXIX)", *Orpheus* N.S. 10 (1989) 101-116.

¹⁵ Cf. F. Vian, "A propos de la 'Vision de Dorotheos'", *ZPE* 60 (1985) 45-9.

¹⁶ Cf. E. Livrea, "Esichio e la Visione di Dorotheos", *Glotta* 70 (1992) 71-81.

forms of verbs. It is typical of this relatively superficial culture which likes to show off its erudition, that 'Dorotheus' also employs some philosophical terms.

If we were to believe Livrea, however, 'Dorotheus' was only seemingly superficial but in reality the author of a profound, Gnostic allegory. For this interpretation Livrea adduces four main arguments. (1) At the end of the vision 'Dorotheus' receives a new outfit (328-35):

From afar the men looked at me in astonishment, seeing how big I was and that I did not have simple clothing, but a cloak, when I was standing at the gate as before, was I wearing, made for me from two different sorts of linen (?). I stood with an *orarium* wrapped around my neck and round my legs I wore breeches rising on high. And I also wore a glittering girdle. As before I appeared standing at the gate...

This passage Livrea wants to interpret in the light of Proclus' statement that myths customarily take clothes as symbols of incorporeal lives.¹⁷ (2) He finds a similar initiation through assuming a new garment in the Orphic fragment no. 238 (Kern = Macrobius *Sat.* 1,18,22). (3) He compares the splendid robe of the son of the king in the *Hymn of the Pearl* of the *Acts of Thomas*, which symbolizes immortality or the image of God, and which man regains when he is dressed with his heavenly double, his twin brother Jesus, with the soldier's cloak in the just quoted passage of the *Vision*. This cloak, according to Livrea, is the εἰκών, the heavenly double of the Spirit, and the two kinds of linen are a representation of the νοῦς and the ψυχή, united after christening. (4) Another connection between the *Vision* and the *Hymn* Livrea sees in the name Andreas, which 'Dorotheus' assumes before being baptized (226-7), and which recurs, so Livrea, in the (Greek) words spoken in the *Hymn* (91-2): "I belong to the most valiant (ἀνδρειοτάτου) servant, for whom they reared me before my father."

Unfortunately, Livrea's interpretation is completely unconvincing, as a closer inspection of his arguments will show. As regards the final passage of the *Vision* it must be objected that his interpretation finds no support in the text and completely fails to take into account the realistic background of this passage. Normally, soldiers only had a linen undergarment, the *camisia*, but

¹⁷ Proclus *In Plat. Remp.* 2,246,10 ff., cf. Livrea (n. 3) 693; id., "La Vision de Dorotheós", in *Proceedings of the XVIII International Congress of Papyrology, Athens 25-31 May 1986* I ed. B.G. Mandilaras (Athens 1988, 445-51) 445-6.

the members of the *schola palatina* also possessed an overgarment of white linen, which gave them the name of *candidati*. Other details mentioned in the text, such as the breeches and the cravat, also fit a soldier's outfit but hardly Livrea's allegorical interpretation; not surprisingly, he fails to take them into account in his analysis and thus overlooks an important aspect of fourth-century Roman culture: the love of uniforms.¹⁸ Livrea's Orphic fragment is not persuasive either, as it mentions the *νεβρίς*, a piece of clothing which we know to have been actually worn by Dionysos' followers.¹⁹

As regards the *Hymn of the Pearl* and the *Acts of Thomas*, it may be doubted whether we can really call these works Gnostic. In his introduction to the most recent edition of the German standard translation, Han Drijvers has rather stressed that they lack all typical Gnostic traits but are marked by a soteriological character.²⁰ Finally, Livrea's interpretation of the name Andreas passes over other indications in the text. 'Dorotheus' chooses his name, as courage failed him: immediately after he had received his new name, Jesus prayed God for faith and courage (*ἀνδρείαν*: 229). At the end of the *Vision* (306-7) he also states that he used to be a coward but now feels himself to be a hero, who even wants to be sent out to foreign men. To conclude, Livrea's Gnostic interpretation is built on sand and lacks a solid basis.

It would of course be nice if, after having declined Livrea's interpretation, we could offer a convincing, new view of the *Vision*. This is not the case. We may observe, though, that 'Dorotheus' heavily stresses poetic inspiration. Right at the beginning, in lines 1-3, he states that God has put in his heart "the desire for graceful song". The theme recurs after his flogging, when he thanks Gabriel for "putting graceful song into my heart" (173-4). Finally, he concludes his vision with the hope that he will "sing about the deeds of the righteous and also of Christ the Lord, year after year ever more delightful for a singer" (342-3).

Yet, this emphasis on poetic inspiration does not help us to reach a closer understanding of the author's poetic purpose. His poem is rather unusual in early-Christian literature, where hexametric poetry is not found that often: before Dorotheus we only have the *Oracula Sibyllina* VI-VIII and the poetry of Gregory of

¹⁸ Cf. R. MacMullen, *Changes in the Roman Empire. Essays in the Ordinary* (Princeton 1990) 95-102.

¹⁹ Euripides *Bacch.* 24 and Roux ad loc.

²⁰ H.J.W. Drijvers, in *NtA* II 294-8.

Nazianze. What does this mean? And what is the precise theological background of the *Vision*? A grim, cruel Christ, as appearing in this poem, is rather unique in early Christian theology; the closest parallel occurs in the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* (3 and 5), of which the complicated state of the tradition does not allow a certain dating.²¹ Is it significant that visions of God in heaven are typical of the Jewish *Hekhalot*-literature and that the whipping by angels also occurs in the Babylonian Talmud (*Chagiga* 15a). But then, whipping angels also occur both in the *Visio Pauli* (2) and the *Martyrium Petri* (17) of Pseudo-Linus. Does the vision perhaps have a hidden meaning, in so far that 'Dorotheus' has only accomplished a half-way entry into the Kingdom of God, that means to say only into His forecourt? Did the poet describe a personal experience? The *Vision of Dorotheus* still poses many problems!²²

²¹ Cf. *NtLA* I 349-61.

²² For various corrections and suggestions I am most grateful to Ton Hilhorst.

SYNESIUS OF CYRENE, HYMN 8: A PERSPECTIVE ON HIS POETIC ART

by

J.H. BARKHUIZEN

Text:

- Πολυήρατε, κύδιμε,
σέ, μάκαρ, γόνε παρθένου
ὑμνῶ Σολυμηίδος·
- 5 ὃς τὰν δολίαν πάγαν,
χθόνιον μεγάλων ὄφιν
πατρὸς ἤλασας ὀρχάτων.
ὃς καρπὸν ἀπώμοτον,
τροφὸν ἀργαλέου μόρου,
πόρεν ἀρχηγόνῃ κόρῃ.
- 10 Στεφανηφόρε, κύδιμε,
σέ, πάτερ, παῖ παρθένου
ὑμνῶ Σολυμηίδος.
- Κατέβας μέχρι καὶ χθονὸς
ἐπίδημος ἐφάμεροις
15 βρότεόν τε φέρων δέμας,
κατέβας δ' ὑπὸ Τάρταρα,
ψυχᾶν ὅθι μυρία
θάνατος νέμεν ἔθνεα.
φρίξεν σε γέρων τότε
20 Ἀΐδας ὁ παλαιγενής,
καὶ λαοβόρος κύων,
δαίμων ὁ βαρυσθενής
ἀνεχάσσατο βηλοῦ.
λύσας δ' ἀπὸ πημάτων
25 ψυχᾶν ὁσίους χορούς,
θιάσους σὺν ἀκηράτοις
ὕμνοις ἀνάγεις πατρί.
- Στεφανηφόρε, κύδιμε,
σέ, πάτερ, παῖ παρθένου
30 ὑμνῶ Σολυμηίδος.
- Ἀνιόντα σε, κοίρανε,
τὰ κατ' ἡέρος ἄσπετα
τρέσεν ἔθνεα δαμώνων.
θάμβησε δ' ἀκηράτων
35 χορὸς ἄμβροτος ἀστέρων.
αἰθήρ δὲ γελάσας,
σοφὸς ἀρμονίας πατήρ,
ἐξ ἑπτατόνου λύρας
ἐκεράσσατο μουσικᾶν
40 ἐπινίκιον ἐς μέλος.
μείδησεν Ἐωσφόρος,
ὁ διάκτορος ἡμέρας,
καὶ χρύσεος Ἔσπερος,
Κυθερήιος ἀστήρ·
45 ἃ μὲν κερόεν σέλας
πλήσασα ῥόου πυρὸς
ἀγείτο Σελάνα,
ποιμὴν νυχίων θεῶν·
τὰν δ' εὐρυφαῖ κόμαν
50 Τιτὰν ἐπετάσσατο
ἄρρητον ὑπ' ἰχνιον,
ἔγνω δὲ γόνον θεοῦ·
τὸν ἀριστοτέχνην νόον,
ἰδίου πυρὸς ἀρχάν.
55 σὺ δὲ ταρσὸν ἐλάσας
κυανάντυγος οὐρανοῦ
ὑπερήλαο νώτων,
σφαίρησι δ' ἐπεστάθης
νοεραῖσιν ἀκηράτοις,
60 ἀγαθῶν ὅθι παγὰ,
σιγώμενος οὐρανός.
ἐνθ' οὔτε βαθύρροος
ἀκαμαντοπόδας χρόνος
χθονὸς ἔκγονα σύρων,

65 οὐ κῆρες ἀναιδέες
 βαθυκύμονος ὕλας·
 ἀλλ' αὐτὸς ἀγήραος
 αἰὼν ὁ παλαιγενής,

νέος ὢν ἅμα καὶ γέρον,
 70 τᾷς ἀενάω μονᾷς
 ταμίας πέλεται θεοῖς.

HYMN 8 OF SYNESIUS: A CHRIST-EPINIKION

One of the most interesting aspects of the early Christian hymn is the creation of the so-called Christ-hymns.¹ As to the creation of this specific type of hymn, one could join Martin,² who has formulated the question as to the reason for the creation of these hymns as follows: "What was the 'catalyst' that led to the creation of new forms of hymns in the New Testament period, specifically the hymn directed to the praise of Jesus Christ as exalted Lord and ruler of creation?" The answer, according to Martin, accepted by many scholars, must be looked for in the wide-spread phenomenon called Gnosticism. The threat posed by Gnosticism, as far as orthodox theology was concerned, was especially the denial of Christ as mediator between God and sinful man. And since the heavenly powers were still ruling, and the space between man and God, who is pure Spirit, is filled with evil aeons, the consequence was an uncertainty regarding the meaning of life itself. The need therefore arose to have communion with a god who could liberate man from these cosmic powers. Such a god was worshipped as κύριος and σωτήρ.

It is against this background that the Christ-hymns are thought to be created: praising Christ for what He has done before his incarnation (the pre-existent Christ or Logos), for his coming to earth as Saviour of mankind (the incarnate Christ), and his ultimate victory and rule over the cosmic powers, with special focus on his cosmological role as *Christus triumphator*. And it is subsequently also against this background that the statement of Ephesians 6,12 should be understood: "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms". The hymns in the letters to the Philippians (2,6-11) and Colossians (1,15-20), and the star-hymn in Ignatius *Eph.* 19,2-3, are three of the earliest examples of this type of hymns.

¹ See especially R. Deichgräber, *Gotteshymnus und Christushymnus in der frühen Christenheit* (Göttingen 1967).

² R.P. Martin, "New Testament Hymns: Background and development", *Expository Times* 94 (1983) 132-6.

Looking at the eighth hymn of Synesius it immediately becomes clear that it also is a striking example of precisely this type of hymn. As such it has been appropriately called a Christ-*epinikion* or -*apotheosis*, and it represents indeed a superb example of his poetic art and religious thought, which is more or less confirmed by Lacombrade,³ who writes as follows: "cette 'apothéose' du Christ émerveille par la hardiesse du sujet, la vigueur du mouvement, la magnificence et l'éclat des images." That it fits in perfectly with the Christ-hymns described above, is clear from both its formal and thematic structure.

Next to Gregory of Nazianzus, Synesius (370-414) is one of the most important poets who composed hymns in classical meters. Being born from an influential family in Cyrene, he studied philosophy under the well-known philosopher Hypatia, especially in the field of Neo-Platonism. He was converted to Christianity and consecrated bishop of Cyrene in 411, although much against his will. He is especially known for his nine hymns, which, according to Baldwin,⁴ can be described as "a farrago of Neoplatonist and other images and ideas". He wrote these hymns in the Doric dialect using anapaestic mono-, di- and trimeters. Hymns 6 to 8 form a close unit and are defined by Lacombrade as Christological hymns.⁵

Regarding the formal structure of Hymn 8, Synesius employs, as in the case of Hymn 6, the hymnic element of refrain: lines 1-3, serving as opening *inuocatio*, are repeated in lines 10-12 and 28-30, thus serving as refrain to divide the hymn into three sections, the second and third section each being sub-divided into two phases each:

- (a) lines 4-9 refer to Christ's victory over the 'serpent';
- (b) lines 13-27 refer to his twofold descent, firstly to earth in the form of mortal man (13-15), and secondly to his descent into the netherworld (16-27);
- (c) lines 31-71 refer, again firstly to his triumphant ascension through the heavenly spheres (31-54), and secondly to his arrival at the Father, i.e. to his *apotheosis* (55-71).

The obvious fact that each section becomes progressively longer, indicates that the thought-sequence of the hymn is structured in such a manner that it finds its culmination in the *apotheosis* of Christ. This is in line with the thought pattern or thematic struc-

³ Ch. Lacombrade, *Synésios de Cyrène. Tome I: Hymnes* (Paris 1978) 92.

⁴ B. Baldwin, *An Anthology of Byzantine Poetry* (Amsterdam 1985) 44.

⁵ Lacombrade 1978 (n. 3) 20-2.

ture of similar Christ-hymns in the New Testament and post-biblical period.⁶

THE CHRISTOLOGICAL CHARACTER OF HYMN 8

In line with the Christ-hymns defined above, the characterization of Christ in hymn 8 is very specifically related to the perception of Christ as *Christus triumphator*. This is already clear in the first phase of the hymn's thematic structure (lines 4-9). In these lines Synesius refers to Christ's victory over the serpent, by means of which Christ is perceived as fulfilling the prophecy of Gen. 3. Of importance is the fact that Synesius defines this victory in terms of Christ expelling the serpent from the garden of the Father. This concept of violent action against the evil forces of sin and death, is later continued in the hymn in extensive form when the poet refers to Hades and Cerberus recoiling in a state of fear before the victorious Christ, as well as the trepidation of the demons before Christ ascending gloriously through the heavenly realms, as will be discussed below. The fact that the expulsion of the serpent is connected with the forbidden fruit given to Eve and which caused mankind painful death, also clearly suggests that Christ, by means of his incarnation, has canceled out the effect of primordial sin.⁷

As to the refrain of lines 10-12, the title πολυήρατε, with which the hymn begins, is here significantly replaced by the word στεφανηφόρε. This title, which has its roots in the Greek agonistic world, and which has been introduced into Christian thought via the Pauline and Deutero-Pauline phraseology, is repeated in the third occurrence of the refrain in lines 28-30, and the use of this title together with the fact that it is repeated in lines 28-30, is a clear continuation of the poet's characterization of Christ as triumphant God.

In the second unit of the hymn's thematic structure (13-27), containing the description of Christ's incarnation, the characterization of Christ as *Christus triumphator* gains in depth by the fact that the poet shuns every reference to Christ's suffering.⁸ The

⁶ See *inter alia* J. Gnllka, "Der Christushymnus des Philipperbriefes (2,6-11) und die neutestamentliche Hymnendichtung", in *Liturgie und Dichtung* ed. H. Becker—R. Kaczynski (St. Ottilien 1983) 173-85.

⁷ Cf. Lacombrade 1978 (n. 3) 92.

⁸ Lines 14-15, however, do contain some allusion to the humiliation of Christ. In line 14 the word ἐφαμέροις is of special importance: in pagan Greek literature it is a traditional concept to indicate man's ephemeral nature, either as a being whose life is as short as the day, cf. M.W. Dickie, "On the meaning of

same avoidance of the cross as a symbol of suffering can be detected in Christian iconography in the pre-Nicene period.⁹ Here it clearly reflects the poet's focus on Christ as triumphant God.

In the form of an anaphora (κατέβας in 16 reflecting κατέβας in 13) the hymn's thought sequence is taken further by means of a description of the *descensus Christi ad inferos* (16-27). Synesius follows the tradition according to which Christ attacks the portals of the underworld and after a victorious battle against the powers of Hades, Adam and mankind are released. Relating how Hades and Cerberus recoil before Christ, the poet uses two motifs, the fear motif (φοῖξεν [19] and ἀνεχάσσαστο βηλοῦ [23]), and the salvation motif (λύσας δ' ἀπὸ πημάτων [24]), to focus on the triumphal character of Christ. Referring also to Christ who, after his victory over the powers of the underworld, raises hymns to the Father, the word 'raise' or 'lift up' (ἀνάγεις) signals indeed the turning-point of the poem, for the downward movement of Christ, first to earth and then into Hades, and indicated by the repeated use of κατέβας in 13 and 16, is checked by the use of ἀνάγεις in line 27, the final line of the second unit, and which at the same time anticipates the ascension of Christ expressed by the word ἀνόντα of line 31, with which the third unit begins.

This third unit, also constituting two phases, the ascension of Christ and his *apotheosis*, is introduced by the title κοίτανε, which is, according to Smolak,¹⁰ a conscious "Poetisierung" of the messianic title κύριος. In the phase containing a description of Christ's ascension (lines 31-54), Synesius refers to various cosmic or heavenly powers. Again of importance for the characterization of Christ as *triumphator*, is the occurrence of four religious motifs in these lines:

(i) The first is the fear motif, expressed by the words τρέσεν (33), referring to the fear of the demons. The fear motif is related to the power of God ὑψιστος, and originates, according to Smolak,¹¹ from a non-Christian tradition, although it should be

ἐφήμερος", *ICS* 1 (1976) 7-14, or as one who is subjected to the vicissitudes characteristic of every day, cf. H. Fränkel, *Wege und Formen frühgriechischen Denkens* (München 1960) 23-9. The fact that the poet immediately refers to Christ as βρότεόν τε φέρον δέμας, with βρότεόν clearly related to the concept inherent in ἐφαιμέροις, is in my view a clear allusion to the humiliation inherent in Christ's incarnation.

⁹ Cf. Lacombrade 1978 (n. 3) 92 and L.H. Grondijs, *L'iconographie byzantine du Crucifié mort sur la croix* (Bruxelles 1947).

¹⁰ K. Smolak, "Zur Himmelfahrt Christi bei Synesios von Kyrene (Hy. 8,31-54 Terz.)", *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 20 (1971) 7-30, esp. 9. For the expression κοίτανε κόσμον see ib. 9-10.

¹¹ Smolak 1971 (n. 10) 10-11.

pointed out that this motif is also well attested in Holy Scripture.¹² In any case, those powers that resist the souls on their heavenly journey, are now trembling with fear before the true κύριος κόσμου.¹³

(ii) Secondly the poet uses the amazement motif (θάμβησε, 34), which serves as antithesis to the fear motif of τρέσεν (33),¹⁴ refers to the concept of the visual witnessing of an event (cf. Homer *Il.* 8,76-7 οἱ δὲ ἰδόντες θάμβησαν), and is related to the concept of the "Himmelfahrt als θέαμα der Engel",¹⁵ based on Psalm 24,9-10. In line with the analogy between angels and stars (cf. Gregory of Nazianzus *Carm.* 1,1,34,6 ff. [PG 37,515A]; Ignatius *Eph.* 19,2-3), the 'angels' are here replaced by the poet with the χορός ἀστέρων. For an interesting parallel in sixth century hymnography, cf. Romanos the Melodist *Hymn on the Adoration of the Cross*, 39,9,2 (SC 128,336), φωτὸς γὰρ εὗρον χορείαν, and J. Grosdidier de Matons ad loc.: "Χορεία nous paraît désigner ici «chœur de danse», formé par les astres ...".

(iii) Thirdly we find the laughter motif, expressed in the words γελάσας (36) and μείδησεν (41) with reference to Ether and Dawn/Aurora. Both words are expressive of joy, and this joy motif, going back as far as Homer *Il.* 19,362 ff. and other classical authors, Synesius has given a biblical character (see Psalm 96,11), as Smolak¹⁶ has put it: "Das ist das in biblische Form gebrachte Epiphaniemotiv der kosmischen Freude ...". In Synesius, this motif of joy culminates, significantly, in the victory song for Christ, the ἐπινίκιον .. μέλος (line 40), a motif closely related to Christ's victory over the powers of Hades as attested in other sources, e.g. *Descensus Christi ad inferos* 8,2 (= *Acta Pilati* 24,2): Πορευομένου δὲ αὐτοῦ ἔψαλλον οἱ ἅγιοι πατέρες ἀκολουθοῦντες αὐτῷ κτλ., and Romanos the Melodist *Sixth Hymn on the Resurrection*, 45,19,8-9 (SC 128,598), ὅθεν ... ἐκφανεῖς τότε ὁ ἄγγελος ἐπινίκιον ὕμνον ἥσέ μοι κτλ., and also *Second Hymn on the Resurrection*, 41,20,8 (SC 128,450), σὲ δὲ πᾶσα ἡ γῆ προσκυνεῖ ἐπινίκιον ᾄδουσα Ἀνέστη ὁ κύριος.

(iv) Fourthly Synesius employs the worship motif said of Helios, the sun, and expressed in the word ἔγνω, which is a technical term for the intellectual-religious acknowledgement of the gods,

¹² Cf. e.g. Job 26,5-14; Ps. 77,17; 89,8; 97,4.

¹³ Cf. Smolak 1971 (n. 10) 11 n. 19.

¹⁴ Smolak 1971 (n. 10) 11.

¹⁵ Smolak 1971 (n. 10) 11.

¹⁶ Smolak 1971 (n. 10) 14.

the γνῶσις θεῶν.¹⁷ This intellectual and religious acknowledgement of Christ on the part of Helios, defined in terms of Christ as the creative Nous, the very source of the sun's fire, is directed against the Gnostic idea of Christ as part of the creation, and serves to emphasize Christ's prevalence over Helios (the Sun), and consequently to focus strongly on the triumphant and divine power of Christ as Creator, and not the created.

The second phase of the third unit (55-71) contains a description of the *apotheosis Christi*: his arrival at the realm of the spirits, which is called the "heaven concerning which man could only maintain silence", exalted above all astral and cosmic powers, containing as such the final crescendo of this Christ-*epinikion* (cf. 1 Peter 3,22: "who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to Him"). Lacombrade¹⁸ remarks in this connection that this hymn can be viewed as a poetical expansion of the credo contained in the Letter to the Hebrews, chapter 1,3, to which also verse 4 should be added: "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs". The concept of the 'heavens concerning which man could only maintain silence' also occurs in the Chaldaean Oracles (*Or. Chald.* fr. 16)¹⁹ referring to the abode of the transcendental gods. Since this abode is above all human thought, perception and contemplation, man can merely keep silence about it.²⁰ Here lives neither Time nor Death, those powers that control mankind; only timeless Eternity is found here, young and old at the same time, the ταμίς of the abode of the heavenly spirits surrounding God.²¹ Thus Synesius's hymn acquires a *dialectic* character: God as *deus exsuperantissimus*, who abides in the unattainable and timeless heavenly spheres of the *nous*, nevertheless reaches out through Christ towards mankind and leads the soul

¹⁷ See also Smolak 1971 (n. 10) 24 with note 97, as well as K. Kleve, *Gnosis Theon* (Symbolae Osloenses Supplementum 9, Oslo 1963) 79 and 112.

¹⁸ Lacombrade 1978 (n. 3) 93.

¹⁹ R. Majercik, *The Chaldaean Oracles* (Studies in Greek and Roman Religion 5, Leiden 1989).

²⁰ U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, "Die Hymnen des Proklos und Synesios", *Sitzungsberichte der königlich Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* 1907, 272-95, esp. 290.

²¹ See N. Terzaghi, *Synesi Cyrenensis Hymni* (Roma 1939) 269.

back to God (lines 24-7).²² Hymn 8 of Synesius thus represents an example of what Christian 'worship' constitutes in essence: a reaching out towards the transcendental God as well as a reflection on God's salvific acts in Christ for the sake of man's salvation.²³

THE COSMOLOGICAL AND MYTHOLOGICAL DIMENSION OF HYMN 8

Next to the triumphal character of the Christ figure in Synesius, his poetry, especially the eighth hymn, serves as excellent example of the so-called contamination technique of the poetry of late antiquity,²⁴ expressed in this hymn in the form of a multi-dimensional perspective of a Christian and syncretistic mythological cosmology. The following are typical examples of this technique:

Firstly, an interesting form of this type of syncretism occurs as early as line 5, in which the poet refers to the serpent as *χθόνιον* ... ὄφιν. The concept of the 'serpent' as symbol and embodiment of evil is essentially an eastern-biblical concept. Synesius thus mythologizes the serpent by defining it as *χθόνιον*, an adjective which is most often related to the underworld and the powers of the underworld (Hesiod *Th.* 767; *Op.* 465; Aeschylus *Ag.* 89; *Pers.* 641; Euripides *Alc.* 237 etc.—cf. also LSJ, page 1991).

Secondly, in the description of the *descensus Christi ad inferos*, which has been developed from pagan soteriology into a Christian credo, Christ is presented in terms of pagan Greek mythology as the 'new Heracles', descending into Hades and conquering Cerberus.²⁵ But I think there is also another mythological allusion in this very passage: after his victory over Hades and Cerberus, Christ frees Adam and mankind, and offers hymns to the Father. This is probably an allusion to Orpheus, who had also descended down to Hades, and conquered Hades, not by virtue of his strength, as did Heracles, but by virtue of his music, releasing in this way his wife from the realms of the dead. Synesius significantly connects Christ, in his victory over Hades and his liber-

²² See H. Strohm, "Zur Hymnendichtung des Synesios von Kyrene", *Hermes* 93 (1965) 47-54.

²³ See J.D. Crichton, "A Theology of Worship", in *The Study of Liturgy* ed. Ch. Jones—G. Wainwright—E. Yarnold (London 1980) 5 ff.

²⁴ Cf. Smolak 1971 (n. 10) 30. The basic notion of the contamination technique constitutes a syncretism of ideas taken from various philosophies and religious thoughts.

²⁵ See M. Simon, *Hercule et le christianisme* (Paris 1955); T.C.W. Stinton, "The Apotheosis of Heracles from the Pyre", in id., *Collected papers on Greek Tragedy* (Oxford 1990); Terzaghi 1939 (n. 21) 264-5.

ation of the souls from Tartarus, with music (hymns)!

Thirdly, the most extensive form of syncretistic presentation in this hymn occurs in the final description of Christ's ascension, as Smolak has shown in a detailed study of lines 31-54,²⁶ and which need not be repeated here. Important as far as our theme is concerned, is to note that the cosmological and mythological dimension revealed in this section, presenting a cosmological order of demons—astral powers—Ether—the Evening and Morning Star—the Moon—and Helios as culminating point, is partly a reflection of a Christological cosmology (cf. Col. 1,15-20, 1 Pet. 3,22, and Ignatius *Eph.* 19,2-3, the star-hymn), and partly a reflection of a cosmology based on the Chaldaean Oracles, as Theiler has shown in his study on the hymns of Synesius.²⁷

To conclude: a study of hymn 8, revealing both the characterization of Christ as *triumphator*, and the implementation of the contamination technique of Late Antiquity, as discussed above, points, in no uncertain terms, to Synesius as heir and mediator of Hellenism *par excellence* ("légataire et médiateur de l'hellénisme"²⁸), a fact which goes a long way in explaining Synesius's influence as Christian poet-philosopher in later Byzantine scholarship, and underlining at the same time the important and unique role he occupies in the development of early Christian poetry.

²⁶ Smolak 1971 (n. 10) 9-30.

²⁷ W. Theiler, *Die chaldäischen Orakel und die Hymnen des Synesios* (Schriften der Königsberger Gelehrten Gesellschaft 18,1; Halle 1942); also Smolak 1971 (n. 10) 26 ff.

²⁸ Lacombrade 1978 (n. 3) XLIV.

THE POETICAL WRITINGS OF THE EMPRESS EUDOCIA: AN EVALUATION

by

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It is remarkable how often late classical and Byzantine empresses or other female members of imperial families appear before the footlights in recent scholarship.¹ More and more the part they played in history and literature is being acknowledged. Pulcheria, sister of Theodosius II, the legendary Theodora, wife of Justinian, Theophano, niece of the emperor John Tzimiskes and wife of Otto II, the unlucky Zoë, daughter of Constantine VIII and wife of Romanus III Argyrus, Michael IV and Constantine IX Monomachos, they all receive nowadays the attention they deserve. In former days the situation was totally different: indeed, the articles and books published in the past are worthless and present the empress or the princess as the central figure of a novel one would rather buy in a railway bookstall.

Eudocia, wife of Theodosius II (408-450), is a telling example.² She is the first writing empress in history we know. It was Ferdinand Gregorovius with his fascinating booklet *Athenais, Geschichte einer byzantinischen Kaiserin* (Leipzig 1892; third, revised edition) who was and still is responsible for the myth-making about her

¹ I mention for example R. Browning, *Justinian and Theodora* (London 1971 = 1987); M.J. Borowski, *Pulcheria, Empress of Byzantium: an Investigation of the political and religious aspects of her reign (414-453 A.D.)* (University of Kansas 1974); J.A. Arvites, *Irene, woman emperor of Constantinople, her life and times* (University of Mississippi 1979); Patricia Wilson-Kastner—G.R. Kastner—Ann Millin—Rosemary Rader—J. Reedy, *A Lost Tradition. Women Writers of the Early Church* (Lanham-New York-London 1981); A. von Euw—P. Schreiner, *Kaiserin Theophanu. Begegnung des Ostens und Westens um die Wende des ersten Jahrtausends. Gedenkschrift des Kölner Schnütgen-Museums zum 1000. Todesjahr der Kaiserin* (Köln 1991).

² For a general introduction to Eudocia's life and work, see O. Seeck—L. Cohn, "Eudokia 1", *RE* XI (1907 = 1958) 906-912; H.-G. Beck, "Eudokia (Kaiserin)", *RAC* 6 (1966) 844-7; Jane McIntosh Snyder, *The Woman and the Lyre. Women Writers in Classical Greece and Rome* (Carbondale—Edwardsville 1989) 140-1.

person.³ He tells a touching story about a young Athenian girl of humble origin, Athenaïs, daughter of the pagan sophist Leontius; when her father died, thanks to whom she had received a good education, the poor child found herself disinherited as opposed to her brothers; after a while she settled in Constantinople with a sister of Leontius. Meanwhile Theodosius II was ruling over the eastern part of the Roman empire; when he was twenty, he thought that the time had come to marry. His elder sister Pulcheria, who was actually in power, and Paulinus, a confidant of the emperor, organized a search to find the right candidate; they met Athenaïs and were immediately struck by her beauty and her eloquence; Theodosius, who observed her from behind a curtain, fell in love with her at once. Athenaïs was baptized and named Eudocia, and married to Theodosius. Two little girls were born, one of which died very soon. Eudocia revealed herself as a pious, devoted wife and empress, despite her concern for the cause of pagan dissidents. She composed marvellous verses. But the notorious story of the beautiful Phrygian apple puts an end to this idyllic situation: Theodosius received an extraordinarily large apple; he offered it to Eudocia who passed it to Paulinus; Paulinus then returned it to Theodosius who was consumed by jealousy and accused his wife of adultery. "Where is the apple I gave to you?" he asked her cunningly. "I have eaten it," she swore. As a result Paulinus fell into disgrace and the empress was forced into exile to Jerusalem, where she devoted herself to many pious works and wrote most of her poetry. She died there in 460.

For some people this attractive and romanticized image of Eudocia has prevailed until today; to mention just one instance: Jeanne Tsatsos's book *Empress Athenais-Eudocia. A fifth century Byzantine humanist*, translated by Jean Demos and published in the series "Women of Byzantium" (Brookline, Massachusetts 1977).

It is the merit of both Kenneth Holum⁴ and Alan Cameron⁵ to have studied critically the sources dealing with Eudocia's life, especially John Malalas, who created a romanticized but by no

³ An unchanged reprint of this book was published in F. Gregorovius, *Athen und Athenais. Schicksale einer Stadt und einer Kaiserin im byzantinischen Mittelalter* (Dresden 1927) 706-850.

⁴ "Family Life in the Theodosian House", *Κληρονομία* 8 (1976) 280-92, and more in detail in his book *Theodosian Empresses: Women and Imperial Dominion in Late Antiquity* (The Transformation of the Classical Heritage 3; Berkeley-Los Angeles-London 1982) 112-228.

⁵ "The empress and the poet: paganism and politics at the court of Theodosius II", *Yale Classical Studies* 27 (1981) 270-89.

means credible picture of Eudocia, a century and a half after the facts; later chronicles only built up Malalas's unreliable account with further details. Starting from all kinds of disturbing contradictions in the sources, Holum and Cameron tried to distinguish fact from fiction. They questioned the truth of really everything: Eudocia's Athenian origin, whether she was born as a pagan or as a Christian, her name, whether her family was really that poor, whether her father was really called Leontius, the inheritance-question, how she ended up in Constantinople, in what situation she married Theodosius, what happened to her brothers who hadn't treated her very well, her relationship with Pulcheria, her pagan sympathies, her first voyage to Jerusalem, the apple-affair, why her marriage failed, her exile. An evaluation of the interesting, but opposite conclusions of the studies of Holum and Cameron is beyond the scope of this paper.

Indeed, we are not in the first place interested in Eudocia's historical meaning, but rather in a judgement of her poetical works. Two material factors make such a judgement complicated: most of the writings attributed to her have been lost and part of the remainder (especially the Homerocentones) would not seem to have been written by her. Besides this, the only critical edition of her works (Arthur Ludwich, 1897)⁶ is not comprehensive and quite outdated.⁷

Let us first take a brief look at the works ascribed to her. What immediately strikes us are the richness of her literary production and the variety of the subjects treated.

* An ode to her husband's victory over the Persians (422), nothing of which survives.⁸

* An encomium of the city of Antioch recited before the senate of that town; judging from one specific verse quoted by Evagrius the church historian which has often been commented on,⁹ it was written in dactylic hexameters.

⁶ *Eudociae Augustae, Procli Lycii, Claudiani carminum Graecorum reliquiae. Accedunt Blemyomachiae fragmenta* (Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana; Leipzig 1897) 11-114.

⁷ See for example the critical notes to Ludwich's text by Enrica Salvaneschi, "De Sancto Cypriano", in *Σύγκρισις. Testi e studi di storia e filosofia del linguaggio religioso* I (Genova 1982) 11-80, by C. Bevegni, "Note a Eudocia 'De Sancto Cypriano' I 5 e I 32", *Sandalion* 4 (1981) 183-9, and by the same author, "Due note testuali ad Eudocia 'De Sancto Cypriano' I 275 e II 43", *Sandalion* 5 (1982) 277-82.

⁸ This text is mentioned in the *H.E.* of Socrates (7,21; PG 67,784 A14-B3).

⁹ *H.E.* 1,20; cf. *The Ecclesiastical History of Evagrius with the Scholia* ed. J. Bidez—L. Parmentier (Byzantine Texts; London 1898 = New York 1979) 29, l. 1; see also Ludwich 1897 (n. 6) 11-13. This verse which recalls *Il.* 6,211 or 20,241 (ὅμε-

* A metrical paraphrase of several books of the Old Testament: Photius mentions in his *Bibliotheca* paraphrases of the Octateuch (codex 183; only two verses have survived) and of the prophets Zechariah and Daniel (codex 184).¹⁰

* A hexameter poem in three volumes paraphrasing the life of St Cyprian of Antioch; only part of it has survived, whereas Photius (*Bibliotheca*, codex 184) had the opportunity to read the entire work.¹¹

* On the authenticity of the Homerocentones there is much dispute: Eudocia and some co-writers probably adapted and completed an unfinished work by a bishop called Patricius; the work consists of a series of short poems, ranging from 15 to 50 hexameters, 2343 in all; they were partly or completely taken from the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey* and they retell biblical history; only 490 of them were published.¹²

* An enigmatic inscription, 17 hexameters long, full of obscure names, has recently been discovered in Hammat Gader's baths in the Yarmuth-valley (Israel); this poem, attributed explicitly to Eudocia, recommends the healing force of hot water sources.¹³

τέρης γενεῆς τε καὶ αἵματος εὐχομαι εἶναι, "of your race and blood I boast to be"), is crucial for the problem of Eudocia's origin (Athens, Antioch or Alexandria?).

¹⁰ I have used the edition of R. Henry, *Photius. Bibliothèque* II (Collection byzantine; Paris 1960) 195-9. The twelfth-century author John Tzetzes also mentioned these paraphrases in his *Chiliades* (X,306, 54-58 and 84), cf. *Ioannis Tzetzæ Historiae* ed. P.A.M. Leone (Pubblicazioni dell'Istituto di Filologia Classica. Università degli Studi di Napoli 1; Napoli 1968) 389-90. See also Ludwich 1897 (n. 6) 13-16.

¹¹ For the editions of what is left of this text, see notes 27 and 28.

¹² Cf. Ludwich's edition (n. 6) 81-114. Much research has been done on the Homerocentones: G. Sattler, *De Eudociae Homerocentonibus* (Bayreuth 1904; mainly the identification of the verses of Homer); Enrica Salvaneschi, "Εξ ἄλλου ἄλλο. Antico e tardo antico nelle opere di Eudocia Augusta", in *Δεσμὸς κοινωνίας. Scritti di filologia e filosofia per G. Bartolini nel secondo anniversario della scomparsa 1979-1981* (Genova 1981) 123-88 (study of the sources); Adriana Pignani, "Il modello omerico e la fonte biblica nel centone di Eudocia imperatrice", *Κοινωνία* 9 (1985) 33-41 (Homer and the Bible as sources of the Homerocentones); Adriana Pignani, "Εὐδοκία del Padre, ἀποστολή ed ὑπακοή del Figlio nel Homerocento di Eudocia imperatrice", in *Ταλαγίσκος. Studia Graeca A. Garzya sexagenario a discipulis oblata* (Napoli 1987) 209-23 (study of a dogmatic problem); Anna Maria Alfieri, "Eudocia e il testo di Omero", *Sileno* 13 (1987) 197-219 (corrects and completes the identifications made by Sattler, and underlines the importance of the Homerocentones for the establishment of the text of Homer); Anna Maria Alfieri, "La tecnica compositiva nel centone di Eudocia Augusta", *Sileno* 14 (1988) 137-56 (study of the composition techniques).

¹³ Cf. Judith Green—Yoram Tsafrir, "Greek Inscriptions from Hammat Gader. A Poem by the Empress Eudocia and two Building Inscriptions", *IEJ* 32

It is striking that these works were very much admired and respected by the Byzantines. Eudocia's eloquence and her thorough classical education were praised. Socrates the church historian, a contemporary of Eudocia, called her ἐλλόγιμος.¹⁴ Later chroniclers, like John Malalas,¹⁵ the anonymous author of the *Chronicon Paschale*,¹⁶ Evagrius,¹⁷ Theophanes¹⁸ and George Cedrenus,¹⁹ shared Socrates's appreciation; they named the empress ἐλλόγιμος, καλλιεπής, διαλεγόμενη ἐλλογίμως, ἐν λόγοις διαπρέπουσα or λόγῳ κεκοσμημένη. The Suda used the epithet φιλοεπής.²⁰

Photius in his *Bibliotheca* also commended her poetical works and in particular her paraphrase of the Octateuch: "Ὅπερ ὅτι καὶ γυναικὸς καὶ βασιλείᾳ τρυφώσης καὶ οὕτω καλόν, ἄξιον θαυμάσαι ("The fact that we are dealing with a woman, who is used to a life of luxury in the palace, and that her work is so beautiful, deserves our admiration").²¹ It is known that Photius in his *Bibliotheca*, as in his other works, ignored poetry almost completely. Church and State demanded that future clergymen and functionaries could express themselves correctly in Attic prose; a knowledge of ancient poetry was not necessary to pave the way for a successful career. Besides this, classical poetry with its gods and a variety of mythological figures caused many moral problems for genuine Christians. Consequently, in the time of Photius poetry ended up in marginality, so it seems. This is probably the reason why poems were seldom read in Photius' literary circles and why they hardly appear in his *Bibliotheca*. I say 'hardly': the only poet who finds favour in the eyes of Photius is exactly our dear Eudocia. What is the explanation for this? Let us listen to Photius himself. Eudocia's paraphrase is as plain as the epic genre allows, the rules of which she is acquainted with very thoroughly: Σαφῆς (...) ὁ πόνος ὡς ἐν ἡρώῳ μέτρῳ, εἴ ποὺ τις ἄλλος, καὶ νόμοις (...) τῆς τέχνης βαθύνεται; the σαφήνεια, or clarity, is one of the most important

(1982) 77-91; see also A. Scheiber, "Parallels to a Topos in Eudocia's Poem", *IEJ* 34 (1984) 180-1.

¹⁴ *H.E.* 7,21 (PG 67,784 B4).

¹⁵ *Chron.* 14 (PG 97,525 C12 and 528 C6-7).

¹⁶ PG 92,792 C13.

¹⁷ *H.E.* 1,20; cf. Bidez—Parmentier 1898 (n. 9) 28, l. 25.

¹⁸ *Theophanis Chronographia* ed. C. De Boor I (Stuttgart 1883 = Hildesheim 1963) 83, l. 22.

¹⁹ *Hist. Comp.* (PG 121,641 B4).

²⁰ *Suidae Lexicon* ed. Ada Adler III (Lexicographi Graeci; Leipzig 1933 = Stuttgart 1967) 220, l. 16 (s.v. Κῦρος).

²¹ See codex 183, l. 8-20.

qualities of 'good' literature, as Photius regularly says in his *Bibliotheca*. He commends her because she does not commit the usual poetical 'sins', even though she expresses herself in verses: according to Photius, a poet often makes abuse of his poetic licence to please the ears of many young men and accordingly he disguises the truth (it is typical of Photius that his judgement of texts explicitly starts from the listener's point of view). Nothing of this all with Eudocia: οὔτε (...) ἐξουσία ποιητικῇ μύθοις τὴν ἀλήθειαν τρέπων ἡδύνειν σπουδάζει μειρακίων ὦτα. She follows her model very closely, which is transposed nearly word for word; in her poetry there are no inserted thoughts, no elaborations that weaken the tension of her work or water down the style; nor is the contrary, a concise and summarizing approach, to be found in her poems: οὔτε ταῖς ἐκβολαῖς τὸν ἀκροατὴν διαπλανᾷ τοῦ προκειμένου, ἀλλ' οὕτω περὶ πόδα τὸ μέτρον ἔθετο τοῖς ἀρχαίοις (...). Τὰς (...) διανοίας οὔτε παρατείνων οὔτε συστέλλων ἀεὶ φυλάσσει κυρίας. Καὶ ταῖς λέξεσι (...), ὅπου δυνατόν, τὴν ἐγγύτητα καὶ ὁμοιότητα συνδιαφυλάσσει.²²

In modern literature Eudocia's poetry also has its admirers. Jeanne Tsatsos writes exaltedly: "The rhythm of a verse was always going round and round inside her. Ideas came and came again, and started always from the depths, from the substance of the outside world. Perhaps she owed to poetry this just scale of values which she had as Empress".²³

The scale of characteristics to which 'good' poetry had to correspond according to Photius—we have seen that he considered Eudocia a 'good' poet—is exactly the opposite of what we today expect from a poet: poetic licence, though often at the expense of clarity, as well as originality, virtuosity and creativity are only some of the features in poetry that appeal to us. However, we do not have the right to condemn early-Christian and Byzantine poetry—among which Eudocia's writings—without due consideration. We may not apply anachronistic value judgements. In the past Eudocia's poetry was probably too much criticized, mainly by the editor Arthur Ludwich; a reading of the introduction to his edition²⁴ and of a study published earlier²⁵ leaves the

²² Cf. B. Baldwin, "Photius and Poetry", *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 4 (1987) 9-14; this study can also be found in B. Baldwin, *Studies on Late Roman and Byzantine History, Literature and Language* (London Studies in Classical Philology 12; Amsterdam 1984) 397-402.

²³ *Empress Athenais-Eudocia. A fifth century Byzantine humanist* (Women of Byzantium; Brookline, Massachusetts 1977) 120-1.

impression that he edited Eudocia's verses with growing dislike; which may be the reason why he left his edition unfinished.

I suggest surveying very briefly the criticism which was uttered and which was mostly valid. The examples that follow are all taken from the story of the martyrdom of St Cyprian, the only somewhat longer text of Eudocia of which the attribution is not questioned. The story is based on three existing hagiographical prose texts.²⁶ Until recently, we possessed only 322 lines of the first book (the beginning was lacking) and 479 verses of the second book (of which the end was lost).²⁷ In 1965, 99 more hexameters were discovered so that we now have the entire first book at our disposal.²⁸ Furthermore it is known that some elements of the Faust-legend go back to this life of St Cyprian.²⁹

Let us first have a look at Eudocia's vocabulary, which is artificial and full of affected neologisms. She consistently uses difficult, learned words; especially the rich and exorbitant adjectives attract attention; it would be no luxury to have Liddell-Scott-Jones and Lampe and even more than that at hand. Just two simple examples found in Bevegni's edition: πανυπείροχος (1,6, 'highly experienced') and δαφνοστεφής (1,12, 'crowned with laurels').

Her morphology is inspired by Homer, but sometimes things go wrong here. Occasionally pseudo-epicisms turn up or even forms that conflict with all rules of Greek morphology: for example εἰρώτῃ as the third person singular of the imperfect tense of the verb ἐρωτάω (1,98 ed. Ludwich); or the wrong form οὐμόν instead of τὸν or τὸ ἐμόν (2,452.467 ed. Ludwich): in the first case we read ἐς θόον οὐμόν, in the second case κράτος οὐμόν. In this way hybrid forms are created, such as ἔλλιπα with double λ, result

²⁴ Ludwich 1897 (n. 6) 5-10.

²⁵ "Eudokia, die Gattin des Kaisers Theodosios II, als Dichterin", *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* 37 (1882) 206-25.

²⁶ *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca* 452, 453 and 455. Cf. H. Delehaye, "Cyprien d'Antioche et Cyprien de Carthage", *Analecta Bollandiana* 39 (1921) 314-23; T.A. Sabattini, "S. Cipriano nella tradizione agiografica", *Rivista di Studi Classici* 21 (1973) 181-204, esp. 197-9; G. Kastner, "Introduction to Eudokia's 'Martyrdom of St. Cyprian'" in P. Kastner-Wilson and others 1981 (n. 1) 140-7.

²⁷ Edited by Ludwich 1897 (n. 6) 24-79.

²⁸ These 99 hexameters have been published by C. Bevegni, "Eudociae Augustae Martyrium S. Cypriani I 1-99", *Prometheus* 8 (1982) 249-62.

²⁹ Cf. Th. Zahn, *Cyprian von Antiochien und die deutsche Faustsage* (Erlangen 1882); L. Radermacher, *Griechische Quellen zur Faustsage. Der Zauberer Cyprianus. Die Erzählung des Helladius. Theophilus* (Sitzungsberichte der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien. Philosophisch-historische Klasse 206, 4; Wien-Leipzig 1927); Enrica Salvaneschi, "Un Faust redento", *Σύγκρισις* (n. 7) 1-10.

of archaic, hyper-Homeric influence, and with the ending α which testifies to a later language-period.³⁰ Eudocia often uses different Greek dialects depending on the metre: compare for example the Doric accusative Εὔαν with the Ionic form Εὔη (1,37.162 ed. Ludwig).

Her sentence structure is often complicated. Sometimes there are syntactical inconsistencies too. Thus she inserts the particles κε(ν), γε and τε—again *metri causa*—wherever it suits her: she does not seem aware of the essential meaning of these particles any more: see for example 1,180 (ed. Ludwig): τὸν δέ τε Κυπριανὸς τὸτ' ὀνειδείους βάλε μύθους, where the τε is totally superfluous. These words have become stop-gaps which are used (in the first place the particle κε[ν]) to give her poems a Homeric touch.

Besides these lexical and grammatical 'sins', she allows herself to deal very freely with the prosody and metre of classical epic poetry.

In Eudocia's time people no longer felt the right quantity of syllables; it was the period of the transition from quantitative to accentual rhythm. So it is not surprising that in her poems the short syllables are sometimes considered long and vice versa, wherever it suits her; as an example of this prosodic freedom I mention 1,50 (ed. Ludwig): ἀλλά γε δὴ τάδε πάντα κακὰ καὶ ἀπείρονα τεύξας, in which the striking issue is the second α of κακὰ which is long; we find the contrary in 1,34 (ed. Bevegni): θέσφατα δ' ὥς ἀγόρευσεν ἑοῖς ὀπαδοῖσιν ἕκαστα where the α of ὀπαδοῖσιν is short instead of long. And there are dozens of other examples, especially concerning the length of α, ι and υ. But that's not the whole of the story: Eudocia can make a syllable in one and the same word sometimes short, sometimes long: compare 1,162 (ed. Ludwig) ἐν παραδεισιάδος δαπέδῳ Εὔη σὺν Ἀδάμῳ (the second α of Ἀδάμῳ is long) with 164 πρωτογόνου Ἀδάμου, παίδων μήτηρ ἀνεδείχθη (the second α of Ἀδάμου is short).

She writes her verses in a rough and a clumsy way. Occasionally she violates certain words in order to insert them in a verse: for example 1,4 (ed. Bevegni) the syncopated and elsewhere unattested form θεσπῳδός instead of θεσπιῳδός. Many a disturbing hiatus occurs in her poems, for example 1,136 (ed. Ludwig) ἄξιον παρθενικὴν. ὃ δ' ἀμείβετο ἧ μάλα δὴ με. Caesurae have often been placed improperly: see for example 1,151 (ed. Ludwig) ἐν λεχέ-

³⁰ Cf. Bevegni 1981 (n. 7) 187-9.

εσσι καθῆστο, δόλῳ δ' ἀνενείκατο μῦθον or 2,270 (ed. Ludwig)
 ὀήγεα δ' ἀνθεμόεντα, τὰ περ βροτοὶ ἐκτελέουσι.

Much criticism. As an excuse one could say that many of these mistakes reflect the development of the Greek language and of Greek prosody and metre in the fifth century. But then, Nonnus of Panopolis for example, a well-known contemporary of Eudocia, managed to compose impeccable verses inspired by Homer.

But I still think that Eudocia's poems—I mean her paraphrases and centos—are really worth reading, not because they express original thoughts poetically, but because they breathe an atmosphere of erudition, which the Byzantines adored; she could write these poems only from a deep familiarity with the Homeric epics (also with the Hellenistic epics, like that of Apollonius of Rhodes), from a profound knowledge of the Greek language and thanks to a phenomenal memory. She either composes a poem with complete or half verses taken from Homer—this task need not be underestimated, because it is not a mere mechanical process, but rather an activity in which her τέχνη and her creativity are fully exploited—or she restricts herself to allusions (as in the story of St Cyprian), imbues her language with the Homeric idiom and completes it with Christian elements and her own literary inventions. Her poetry is an important specimen of the so-called 'Homerus christianus'; in this way recent research has discovered Eudocia's skilful composition-technique in the centos.³¹ Besides this, she entertains lavishly, wherever possible, with surprise and alienation. The Homeric idiom is cut out of the original context and applied to a totally different world, such as that of the Gospels: thus Christ is called τηλύγετος (1,123 of the story of St Cyprian, ed. Ludwig), which is said of a child of doubtful origin and also of a favourite child; the attentive reader knows that this Homeric epithet characterizes Hermione, the only daughter of Menelaus and Helena (*Il.* 3,175); Agamemnon's words to Nestor in book 10, verse 95 of the *Iliad* (τρομέει δ' ὑπὸ φαίδιμα γυῖα) are applied by Eudocia to God for whom the whole world trembles (ὄν γαίη τρομέει; 1,117 ed. Ludwig): mind the word-game γυῖα (Homer) and γαίη (Eudocia).

The question may be asked what Eudocia wanted to achieve with such centos and paraphrases.³² In the second half of the

³¹ Cf. Alfieri 1988 (n. 12), esp. 140-56.

³² For the origin and the development of the late classical paraphrase, see M.J. Roberts, *Biblical Epic and Rhetorical Paraphrase in Late Antiquity* (Arca Classical and Medieval Texts, Papers and Monographs 16; Trowbridge 1985).

fourth century, as a reaction against the notorious edict of the emperor Julian (362), such writings were meant for educational purposes. This certainly plays a role in the fifth century too: some authors wanted to present 'safe' classical texts to people who still took offence at purely classical writers like Homer. But there is more: the authors of centos and paraphrases aimed to give durability and value to the story of salvation and to other important Christian texts, like the story of St Cyprian, by putting them in Homer's epic language that surpasses all other forms of poetry; thus they tried to hold Christians with feelings of sympathy for the pagan cause within the believing community. Herbert Hunger beautifully compared this phenomenon with the practice of providing Russian and Byzantine icons with gold or silver frames of which the material value often surpasses the artistic value.³³

As so often, it seems we have to find the truth in the golden mean. Indeed, Eudocia is not a first-class poet, but attacking her poetry too severely is also wrong. One thing sticks: her love for Homer shows us that even in the Holy Land, in that pious environment full of pilgrims and monks, in spite of all that, Eudocia had not forgotten the Athenais of her childhood.³⁴

³³ "On the Imitation (Μίμησις) of Antiquity in Byzantine Literature", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 23-24 (1969-1970) 34; this study can also be found in H. Hunger, *Byzantinistische Grundlagenforschung. Gesammelte Aufsätze* (London 1973) No. XV.

³⁴ I should like to express my thanks to my brother Wenzel and to Peter Van Dessel who have helped with the translation of my paper.

ROMANOS LE MÉLODE UN POÈTE SYRIEN À CONSTANTINOPLE

par

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Parmi les premières études consacrées entièrement ou en partie à la poésie de Romanos le Mélode, figure l'ouvrage classique de Wilhelm Meyer, *Anfang und Ursprung der lateinischen und griechischen rythmischen Dichtung*, publié en 1884.¹ Un siècle plus tard, en 1985, William Petersen fit paraître sa monographie, intitulée *The Diatessaron and Ephrem Syrus as Sources of Romanos the Melodist*.² Ces deux ouvrages, bien que très différents l'un de l'autre, ont en commun qu'ils prêtent une attention particulière à l'influence syrienne sur la poésie ecclésiastique de Byzance, et spécialement sur l'œuvre de Romanos le Mélode. Tout au long du siècle qui sépare les deux publications, les *kontakia* de Romanos n'ont pas cessé de susciter l'intérêt des chercheurs, parmi lesquels figurent des hellénisants et des byzantinistes de grand renom. Une place d'honneur revient incontestablement à José Grosdidier de Matons. Celui-ci n'est pas seulement l'auteur de la meilleure édition critique de cinquante *kontakia*, accompagnée d'une traduction française largement annotée,³ mais il a publié en outre une étude

¹ W. Meyer, *Anfang und Ursprung der lateinischen und griechischen rythmischen Dichtung* (Abhandlungen der philos.-philol. Klasse der kgl. bayer. Akademie der Wissenschaften zu München 17, München 1886) 267-450.

² W.L. Petersen, *The Diatessaron and Ephrem Syrus as Sources of Romanos the Melodist* (CSCO 475, Subsidia 74, Louvain 1985).

³ J. Grosdidier de Matons, *Romanos le Mélode, Hymnes. Introduction, texte critique et notes* (SC 99, 110, 114, 128, 283, Paris 1964-1981). Pour une présentation du dernier volume, cf. J. Munitiz, *VC* 36 (1982) 406-409. Pour les textes de Romanos, le présent article renvoie à cette édition; le chiffre romain de notre référence indique le numéro du volume (I = SC 99, II = SC 110, III = SC 114, IV = SC 128, V = SC 283), tandis que le chiffre arabe donne le numéro du *kontakion*, toujours d'après la numérotation de Grosdidier de Matons. Un aperçu de tous les *kontakia* de Romanos et des diverses éditions est donné dans J. Grosdidier de Matons, *Romanos le Mélode et les origines de la poésie religieuse à Byzance* (Paris 1977) 329-332. Seule l'édition de P. Maas—C.A. Trypanis, *Sancti Romani Melodi Cantica. Cantica genuina* (Oxford 1963) comprend tous les *kontakia* authentiques du mélode.

très riche, dans laquelle il a exposé ses idées sur *Romanos le Mélode et les origines de la poésie religieuse à Byzance* (1977).

Peut-être n'y a-t-il pas beaucoup à ajouter aux résultats de cent ans de recherches des plus éminents savants. Dans ce qui suit, nous voudrions nous limiter à quelques réflexions sur la façon dont l'origine syrienne de Romanos a été traitée par les chercheurs. Cette question, qui inévitablement surgit dans chaque étude consacrée au poète byzantin, et dont l'intérêt nous paraît majeur, a mené à des thèses et opinions très différentes l'une de l'autre. Comment faut-il expliquer ces grandes divergences? Où en sont nos connaissances actuelles sur le contexte culturel dans lequel Romanos a vécu et travaillé dans la première moitié du sixième siècle?

Toutes les sources importantes sont unanimes pour situer la naissance de Romanos à Émèse, actuellement Homs, en Syrie. Après avoir vécu pendant un certain temps à Béryte (Beyrouth), où il était diacre, Romanos s'est établi à Constantinople sous le règne d'Anastase I, c'est-à-dire entre 491 et 518. Il doit avoir travaillé dans la capitale au moins jusqu'en 551.⁴ Une hymne anonyme tardive qualifie Romanos d'"Hébreu" (γένοϛ μὲν ἑβραίων), mais la valeur de ce témoignage n'est pas établie.⁵ Quel était le bagage culturel et littéraire avec lequel cet homme, syrien, juif ou palestinien, arriva à Constantinople?

Grosdidier de Matons insiste beaucoup sur les caractéristiques grecques des *kontakia* de Romanos. Certes, il n'ignore pas l'origine syrienne du poète et il signale l'influence possible de la poésie syriaque, qui connaît son apogée entre le 4^e et le 6^e siècle. Mais tout ce qu'il regarde comme syrien, est décrit par lui en termes généraux et vagues. Ceci est vrai aussi bien pour la description des correspondances formelles entre le *kontakion* et la poésie syriaque (dans laquelle le *madrasha* est présenté comme étant le plus proche du *kontakion*),⁶ que pour ce qui est dit du

⁴ Grosdidier de Matons 1977 (n. 3) 179.

⁵ Grosdidier de Matons 1977 (n. 3) 180, sans se prononcer sur cette question, réfute la théorie de Tomadakis selon laquelle le terme "Hébreux" indiquerait dans un sens très large tous les habitants de la Syrie et de la Palestine. Petersen 1985 (n. 2) 3, se limite à mentionner simplement cette donnée. S. Brock n'exclut pas l'historicité de cet élément biographique, cf. "Two Syriac Verse Homilies on the Binding of Isaac", *Le Muséon* 99 (1986) 92 et 96, et "From Ephrem to Romanos", *SP* 20 (1989) 150. E. Werner, "Hebrew and Oriental Christian Metrical Hymns. A Comparison", *Hebrew Union College Annual* 23 (1950-51) 402-403 et 428 est catégorique sur ce point ("the converted Jew Romanos").

⁶ Grosdidier de Matons 1977 (n. 3) 17.

contenu du *kontakion*. D'une façon générale, la prédilection de Romanos pour des thèmes eschatologiques est mise en rapport avec son origine syrienne,⁷ mais ce rapport n'est précisé nulle part. Grosdidier de Matons est enclin à minimiser, ou même à complètement exclure, l'exploitation possible par Romanos de sources syriaques. Il est même douteux pour lui que Romanos ait eu directement accès à la culture syriaque ou ait connu la langue syriaque. En s'appuyant sur les données de la *Vie de saint Syméon Salos*, de Léontios de Néapolis, il conclut que la ville d'Émèse était pour la plus grande partie hellénophone et que l'emploi du syriaque y était peu répandu, même parmi les petites gens.⁸

Ce n'est donc pas un Romanos syrien, mais un Romanos grec qui est décrit dans l'ouvrage du savant français, un poète qui est le digne héritier de la tradition grecque classique. Cet héritage se révèle dans une utilisation habile des ressources de la rhétorique, dans une combinaison du récit et du dialogue, rappelant la tragédie attique, dans une ironie tantôt âpre, tantôt subtile, et "surtout dans un art tout hellénique de la composition, dont ni la Bible, ni les poètes syriens n'ont pu fournir le modèle à Romanos".⁹ En comparant Romanos à Éphrem le Syrien, Grosdidier de Matons constate qu'"il y a chez le mélode d'Émèse un goût tout hellénique de l'ordre que l'on chercherait en vain chez le poète de Nisibe et chez ceux de son école".¹⁰ Ainsi, l'œuvre de Romanos constitue "l'ultime floraison" de l'art de la Grèce antique.¹¹

Avant de procéder à l'analyse de certains de ces arguments, il convient de présenter brièvement les principaux résultats du travail de Petersen, car ils vont dans un sens tout à fait différent. L'étude minutieuse des citations et allusions néotestamentaires dans les *kontakia* de Romanos a mené cet auteur à supposer que le poète byzantin non seulement a connu et utilisé directement le *Diatessaron* syriaque, mais qu'il a, en outre, emprunté des passages aux ouvrages d'Éphrem le Syrien, aussi bien à son *Commentaire du Diatessaron* qu'à certaines de ses *Hymnes*. Au delà de l'influence probable de la poésie syriaque sur les aspects formels du *kontakion*—indiquée déjà par les prédécesseurs de Grosdidier de Matons, mais minimisée par le savant français—Petersen

⁷ Ib. 278: "Et Romanos ne serait pas Syrien si les thèmes eschatologiques ne lui étaient pas particulièrement familiers".

⁸ Ib. 181.

⁹ Ib. 185.

¹⁰ Ib. 323.

¹¹ Ib. 327.

considère la dépendance littéraire de Romanos par rapport à l'Éphrem syriaque comme établie.¹² Ces conclusions ne peuvent que jeter "les doutes les plus sérieux" sur les assertions de Grosdidier de Matons, selon lequel "rien n'indique qu'il ait eu accès à des ouvrages écrits en langue syriaque" et "rien n'indique que Romanos ait eu le texte d'Éphrem sous les yeux".¹³

Il est extrêmement regrettable que, du fait de sa mort prématurée, Grosdidier de Matons ne soit plus en mesure de contribuer à la discussion passionnante portant sur le caractère de la poésie de Romanos. Nous serons obligé, dès lors, de poursuivre notre enquête sans pouvoir bénéficier de l'érudition et de la compétence du grand maître.

Grec *ou* syriaque, composantes grecques *et* composantes syriaques dans l'œuvre de Romanos: faut-il nécessairement accepter cette dichotomie, ou est-il possible de considérer le problème différemment? Dans ce qui suit nous espérons démontrer qu'une telle division ne fait pas justice à l'œuvre de Romanos et ne tient pas compte du phénomène de synthèse culturelle qui s'est produit dans l'Antiquité au Proche-Orient. Mais d'abord, nous voudrions faire quelques observations sur le genre du *kontakion*.

Pour la forme, le *kontakion* se rapproche de la poésie syriaque sous plusieurs aspects. La structure du *kontakion* consiste en strophes,¹⁴ séparées par un refrain, comme c'est le cas pour le *madrasha* d'Éphrem le Syrien. La division de la strophe en *kôla*, vers et périodes¹⁵ offre également un certain parallélisme avec les *madrashe* syriaques. Le principe de l'isosyllabie (un nombre fixe de syllabes) est une caractéristique de la poésie syriaque (*memra*, *madrasha*, *sogita*), tandis qu'il est une innovation dans la poésie byzantine (mais se retrouve, toutefois, dans l'Éphrem grec).¹⁶ La distinction entre *idiomela* et *prosomoia* a son parallèle dans les mè-

¹² W.L. Petersen, "Romanos and the Diatessaron: Readings and Methods", *New Testament Studies* 29 (1983), surtout 502-503; id., "The Dependence of Romanos the Melodist upon the Syriac Ephrem: Its Importance for the Origin of the Kontakion", *VC* 39 (1985) 171-187, surtout 183-184; id. 1985 (n. 2), surtout 152-168 et 195-197.

¹³ Grosdidier de Matons 1977 (n. 3) 254; Petersen 1985 (n. 2) 199 (245 doit être corrigé en 254 dans la note 6).

¹⁴ Le terme grec οἶκος 'strophe' pourrait correspondre au syriaque *bayta*, cf. Grosdidier de Matons 1977 (n. 3) 39.

¹⁵ *Ib.* 148-156.

¹⁶ Cf. Brock 1989 (n. 5) 141. Pour la recherche sur la poésie de Romanos, l'absence d'une édition critique et d'une étude approfondie de l'Éphrem grec se fait sentir péniblement. Pour un aperçu des textes, voir M. Geerard, *Clavis Patrum Graecorum* II (Turnhout 1974) 366-468 (nos. 3905-4175).

tres primaires et secondaires de l'Éphrem syriaque.¹⁷ L'acrostiche, caractéristique du *kontakion*, n'est pas complètement absent de la poésie syriaque d'Éphrem, mais il y figure moins systématiquement. Tout comme dans la poésie syriaque, la rime n'est pas fréquente chez Romanos.¹⁸ Quant au principe important de l'homotonie (la place fixe des accents principaux), il est difficile, voire impossible, d'en prouver l'existence dans la poésie syriaque.¹⁹

Malgré les caractéristiques propres de la poésie syriaque, d'une part, et du *kontakion* dans sa forme classique, d'autre part, il est certainement légitime d'admettre une parenté entre les deux genres.²⁰ Outre les accords formels mentionnés, il y a une autre particularité—relative aussi bien à la forme qu'au contenu—qui rapproche la poésie de Romanos de celle d'Éphrem, à savoir le rôle important du parallélisme et du contraste. Si H.G. Beck dit à propos de l'œuvre de Romanos que celle-ci transpose "die dogmatische Antithese virtuos in die sprachlich-rhetorische Antithese",²¹ on peut faire la même remarque pour la poésie d'Éphrem.

On a qualifié le *kontakion* de "sermon lyrique et dramatique",²² qualification qui vaut également pour le *madrasha* syriaque. L'élément homilétique du *kontakion* fait penser à l'homélie métrique syriaque (*memra*), tandis que l'élément dramatique et la présence du dialogue renvoient surtout à la *sogita*.²³ Outre la place importante occupée par la Bible, les *kontakia* de Romanos se caractérisent par une tendance ascétique et moralisante, ce qui est vrai aussi pour la poésie d'Éphrem.

Sur tous ces points, Romanos s'accorde donc avec la tradition de la poésie religieuse telle qu'elle nous est connue dans la lit-

¹⁷ Outre les indications des manuscrits individuels, on trouve des renseignements intéressants dans un texte publié par A. de Halleux, "Une clé pour les Hymnes d'Éphrem dans le ms. Sinai Syr. 10", *Le Muséon* 85 (1972) 171-199.

¹⁸ Grosdidier de Matons 1977 (n. 3) 152.

¹⁹ Cf. S.P. Brock, "Syriac and Greek Hymnography: Problems of Origin", *SP* 16 (1985) 78.

²⁰ *Ib.* 81: "While the *kontakion* cannot be called a straight borrowing from Syriac poetry, I think there can be little doubt that the creation of this completely new poetic form in Greek owes not a little inspiration to Syriac religious poetry". Voir aussi *id.* 1989 (n. 6) 141.

²¹ H.-G. Beck, *Byzantinisches Lesebuch* (München 1982) 269.

²² H.-G. Beck, *Kirche und theologische Literatur im byzantinischen Reich* (Byzantinisches Handbuch II, 1; München 1977²) 425.

²³ Pour l'emploi du dialogue dans les différents genres syriaques, cf. Brock 1989 (n. 5) 141-143.

térature syriaque. Il nous reste à examiner dans quelle mesure le poète, dans sa lecture de la Bible et dans son choix de thèmes et de motifs, a été inspiré par la tradition syriaque.²⁴ Pour des interprétations concernant le Nouveau Testament, il convient de renvoyer aux travaux de Petersen.²⁵ Nous voudrions nous limiter ici à présenter certains points et interprétations pris au livre de la Genèse. Bien qu'il ne s'agisse que de points de détail, ceux-ci nous aideront à voir la complexité des rapports qui existent entre Romanos et la tradition syriaque chrétienne.

1. À PROPOS DE GEN. 3,24

Il est question dans le texte biblique des chérubins (hébreu: *kerubim*), qui furent placés à l'entrée du paradis. Le terme hébreu a été translitéré dans la Septante et y est traité comme un pluriel (καὶ ἔταξεν τὰ χερουβίμ).²⁶ À certains endroits Romanos adopte cet usage de la Septante, traitant le mot comme un pluriel, mais il lui arrive aussi de le traiter comme un singulier; ainsi en IV,39, strophe 10: Φύλαξ πιστότατε ... Χερουβίμ πολυόμματα. Ce dernier usage est très rare en grec. Toutefois, on trouve un parallèle, ayant χερουβίμ au singulier, dans le *Commentaire de la Genèse* d'Eusèbe d'Émèse²⁷ et dans la *Vie grecque d'Adam et Ève* (*Apocalypse de Moïse*).²⁸ Il importe de signaler que dans la Bible syriaque le terme correspondant *kroba* est traité comme un singulier. Ceci pourrait bien expliquer les rares emplois du singulier en grec,²⁹ trouvés dans des textes qui ont tous des rapports avec la tradition syriaque.³⁰

²⁴ Pour quelques réflexions sur l'étude comparative des motifs littéraires dans les littératures grecque et syriaque, cf. ib. 143-144.

²⁵ Voir les références dans les notes 2 et 12.

²⁶ Pour ce passage et pour les différentes interprétations du mot χερουβίμ, cf. M. Alexandre, "L'épée de flamme (Gen. 3,24): Textes chrétiens et traditions juives", dans *Hellenica et Judaica. Hommage à V. Nikiprowetzky* ed. A. Caquot e.a. (Louvain—Paris 1986) 406-408.

²⁷ Éd. F. Petit, *La Chaîne sur la Genèse. Édition intégrale, I. Chapitres 1 à 3* (Traditio exegetica graeca 1; Louvain 1991) 300 (no. 466, lignes 3-4). Dans la tradition arménienne de ce commentaire, le mot *k'eroubim* est aussi resté au singulier: V. Hovhannessian, *Eusèbe d'Émèse, I. Commentaire de l'Octateuque* (Venise 1980) 36, lignes 631-632, et 35, lignes 591-592 (la Vulgate arménienne a un pluriel).

²⁸ Éd. D.A. Bertrand, *La Vie grecque d'Adam et Ève* (Paris 1987) 90 (28,3): τῷ χερουβίμ. Ce texte présente plusieurs points de contact avec l'ancienne tradition syriaque.

²⁹ En Ez. 28,14 la Septante a le singulier, mais la forme est dépourvue ici de la désinence du pluriel hébreu: μετὰ τοῦ χερουβ.

³⁰ Pour le Commentaire d'Eusèbe d'Émèse, voir plus loin, 293-294.

2. À PROPOS DE GEN. 6,14

Dans le *kontakion* sur Noé (I,2, strophe 3) Romanos parle des prescriptions données par Dieu en vue de la construction de l'arche. On y trouve le texte suivant: Νῦν οὖν ἄγαγε ὕλην ἀσήπτων ξύλων, "Maintenant donc, apporte des planches de bois imputrescibles".³¹ La Septante lit à cet endroit (Gen. 6,14): "Fais donc pour toi un coffre de pièces de bois équarries" (... ἐκ ξύλων τετραγώνων).³² Le terme "équarries" (τετραγώνων) rend le mot hébreu *gophèr*, *hapax legomenon* dont le sens est inconnu. Le terme employé par Romanos, "imputrescibles" (ἀσήπτων), correspond à la leçon d'Aquila³³ et est attestée, en outre, dans certains manuscrits bibliques.³⁴ La même leçon figure dans le *Commentaire de la Genèse* d'Eusèbe d'Émèse. Dans la version arménienne de ce *Commentaire*, le verset biblique est rendu comme suit: "Toi, fais pour toi un coffre de bois imputrescible".³⁵ Il est légitime, dès lors, de supposer que Romanos suit ici une variante de la Septante, variante connue à Émèse ou dans la région d'Antioche dès le quatrième siècle.

3. À PROPOS DE GENÈSE 22

Le *kontakion* de Romanos sur Abraham (I,3) a été étudié par S. Brock dans une série d'articles consacrés aux développements de l'interprétation du sacrifice d'Abraham dans la tradition syriaque.³⁶ Ce chercheur a prouvé que la seconde partie du *kontakion*, qui est assez différente de la première, présente une étroite parenté avec un *memra* métrique syriaque sur ce thème.³⁷ Il s'agit surtout du rôle attribué à Sara: elle laisse partir son fils volontairement, en pleine conscience de ce qu'Abraham se propose de faire, et à ce moment-même elle s'adresse directement à Isaac. Parenté aussi pour le motif de l'anxiété d'Abraham, qui craint

³¹ La note de l'éditeur à cet endroit est peu éclairante: "Le texte des Septante dit simplement: τετραγώνων. Peut-être le poète s'est-il référé directement au texte hébreu, qui parle d'un bois résineux."

³² La traduction française est empruntée à M. Harl e.a., *La Bible d'Alexandrie*, I. *La Genèse* (Paris 1986).

³³ Cf. Brock 1986 (n. 5) 96, note 91.

³⁴ J.W. Wevers, *Genesis* (Septuaginta I, Göttingen 1974), *in loco*.

³⁵ Éd. Hovhannessian 1980 (n. 27) 44, ligne 870. Comp. Procope de Gaza (PG 87,273A). La Vulgate arménienne lit "équarris", tout comme la Septante.

³⁶ Voir surtout Brock 1986 et 1989 (n. 5).

³⁷ Éd. Brock 1986 (n. 5), *Memra* II (texte pp.117-122; traduction pp. 122-125; notes pp. 125-129).

qu'une réaction ou protestation éventuelle d'Isaac n'annule le sacrifice.³⁸ Qu'il nous suffise de renvoyer à ces études, desquelles ressort clairement l'hypothèse d'une consultation directe par Romanos de sources syriaques.³⁹

4. À PROPOS DE GEN. 27,39

Au moment où le vieil Isaac, après avoir été trompé par Jacob, consent à bénir aussi son fils Ésaü, il dit, d'après la Septante: Ἰδοὺ ἀπὸ τῆς πιότητος τῆς γῆς ἔσται ἡ κατοίκησίς σου, καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς δρόσου τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἄνωθεν, texte qui dans la traduction récente de la Septante est rendu comme suit: "Voici que ta demeure sera *loin de* l'opulence de la terre et *loin de* la rosée du ciel d'en haut."⁴⁰ Le texte grec est ambigu, puisque les mêmes expressions (ἀπὸ τῆς δρόσου et ἀπὸ τῆς πιότητος) sont utilisées au v. 28 du même chapitre (dans la bénédiction de Jacob) avec un sens partitif ("Puisse Dieu te donner *de* la rosée du ciel et *de* l'opulence de la terre").⁴¹ Or, il apparaît que Romanos attribue le sens partitif aussi au v. 39, qu'il paraphrase comme suit (I,4, strophe 7): Ἰδοὺ ἐκ τῆς δρόσου τῶν ὑψωμάτων σοι ἔσται, καὶ ἐκ τῆς γαίας τῆς πιότητος <ἡ> κατοίκησις, "Voici, *dans* la rosée qui tombe des hauteurs et *dans* la graisse de la terre sera ta demeure".⁴² Avant de se prononcer définitivement sur la façon de laquelle cette expression a été comprise par les écrivains grecs, une enquête de tous les auteurs commentant ce verset serait nécessaire. Toutefois, on peut constater dès maintenant que l'interprétation trouvée chez Romanos est adoptée explicitement par Eusèbe d'Émèse, qui dans son *Commentaire de la Genèse* fait la remarque suivante à propos du verset en question: "Que ta demeure soit parmi l'opulence (*i parartut'ene* = ἀπὸ οὐ ἐκ τῆς πιότητος) de la terre, au lieu de dire: dans l'opulence (*i parartut'iwn*) de la terre du demeureras."⁴³ L'auteur constate, d'ailleurs, le parallélisme des deux bénédictions (vv. 28 et 39) et

³⁸ Cf. Brock 1989 (n. 5), surtout 149-150. Voir aussi id. 1989 (n. 5) 91-98.

³⁹ Brock 1989 (n. 5) 150: "These two distinctive features ... strongly suggest that Romanos either knew Memra II itself, or failing that, a lost Syriac homily also attesting these two highly atypical features which set apart these two texts from all the other homiletic treatment, Greek and Syriac, of this episode."

⁴⁰ Harl e.a. 1986 (n. 32) 218.

⁴¹ Tout comme la préposition grecque ἀπό, la préposition hébraïque *min*, utilisée dans les deux versets en question, peut avoir l'un et l'autre sens. La *Bible de Jérusalem* établit la même distinction entre les vv. 28 et 39 que la traduction récente de la Septante. Au v. 39 la Vulgate traduit: *In pinguedine terrae* ...

⁴² Traduction de Grosdidier de Matons, SC 99 (n. 3) 190-191.

⁴³ Ed. Hovhannessian 1980 (n. 27) 77, lignes 833-835.

note que c'est seulement dans la bénédiction du blé, formulée dans le cas de Jacob (v. 28) mais non pas dans celui d'Ésaü, que les deux passages sont différents. Signalons enfin que la Bible syriaque appuie l'interprétation d'Eusèbe et de Romanos, puisqu'au v. 39 elle lit *b-šumna* "dans l'opulence".

5. À PROPOS DE GEN. 37,28

D'après la Septante, Joseph fut vendu aux marchands Madiénéens "pour vingt pièces d'or" (εἴκοσι χρυσῶν). Or, dans le *kontakion* sur Judas le prix de Joseph est fixé à "trente pièces" (IV,33, strophe 19), ce qui permet une comparaison avec le prix que Judas a obtenu pour la trahison de Jésus (Mt. 26,15). Il ne peut s'agir d'une simple liberté que Romanos s'est permise, puisque la variante de "trente pièces" se trouve aussi, comme Grosdidier de Matons l'a remarqué, dans une homélie de Sévérion de Gabala, conservée en arménien.⁴⁴ Tout comme Eusèbe d'Émèse, Sévérion lui aussi était un Syrien écrivant en grec.⁴⁵ L'hypothèse selon laquelle Sévérion et Romanos puisaient à la même tradition scripturaire, répandue en Syrie,⁴⁶ se trouve corroborée par la découverte de la même leçon dans le *Commentaire* syriaque d'Isho'dad de Merv sur la Genèse (c. 850), où une des sources du compilateur, en désaccord avec la Peshitta, lit "trente pièces d'argent".⁴⁷

La leçon des "trente pièces" donne lieu à quelques observations dans la monographie de Grosdidier de Matons.⁴⁸ Le fait que dans une branche de la tradition de Romanos, cette leçon divergente a disparu par suite du remaniement d'une strophe, lui fait supposer que le poète lui-même, en rééditant son travail à l'intention du public de Constantinople, a pu modifier son texte originel, qui aurait été écrit d'abord pour un public syrien, auquel la leçon divergente était familière. Dans cette optique, la

⁴⁴ Grosdidier de Matons SC 128 (n. 3), 92-93; id. 1977 (n. 3) 253. Il est à noter que dans la première Hymne sur Joseph, Romanos connaît la leçon habituelle (I,5,7: εἴκοσι χρυσῶν).

⁴⁵ D'après le témoignage de Socrate, son accent syriaque était bien discernable dans les sermons qu'il faisait à Constantinople. Voir Socrates, *Historia ecclesiastica* VI,11 (PG 67,697A).

⁴⁶ Grosdidier de Matons 1977 (n. 3) 257. D'après l'apparat critique de Wevers, la variante "trente pièces" figure dans deux manuscrits bibliques, cf. Wevers 1974 (n. 34), *in loco*.

⁴⁷ Traduction française dans C. Van den Eynde, *Commentaire d'Isho'dad de Merv sur l'Ancien Testament, I. Genèse* (CSCO 156, Scriptores Syri 75; Louvain 1955) 216, lignes 24-25. Isho'dad connaît cependant aussi la leçon habituelle: ib. 217, ligne 16.

⁴⁸ Grosdidier de Matons 1977 (n. 3) 257.

forme primitive de ce *kontakion* remonterait à la période “syrienne” de Romanos, tandis que la révision daterait de sa période constantinopolitaine.

Ceci nous mène au problème de la chronologie des *kontakia*. Grosdidier de Matons veut attribuer la plupart des *kontakia* qui traitent des thèmes de l’Ancien Testament au début de la carrière de Romanos. Plusieurs arguments sont avancés, qui ont tous rapport à une forme moins achevée, plus incertaine du poète, qui était dans cette première période plus ouvert à l’influence des traditions syriennes locales. Les poèmes de cette période témoigneraient “d’une inspiration plus drue et plus truculente”.⁴⁹ Ceci serait notamment le cas de la deuxième hymne sur Joseph (I,6).⁵⁰ La curieuse structure métrique du *kontakion* sur les Trois enfants dans la fournaise (I,8) serait également un indice d’ancienneté. Pour les *kontakia* sur Élie (I,7) et sur Jonas et Ninive (I,8b), c’est le fait qu’elles paraissent s’inspirer de deux homélies de Basile de Séleucie, qui à ses yeux rend probable une datation dans la période “syrienne”.

On a l’impression que la “dé-syrianisation” de Romanos, opérée par Grosdidier de Matons, comporte deux aspects. D’une part, l’impact de la tradition syrienne sur Romanos est minimisé et réduit à la tradition syrienne en langue grecque (Sévérien de Gabala et Basile de Séleucie). D’autre part, l’influence de cette tradition est reléguée au début de la carrière du mélode, à Beyrouth, très loin du Romanos “classique”, tel qu’il se développa plus tard à Constantinople.

Notre réponse doit également consister en deux parties. D’abord, il nous paraît douteux que le degré de l’influence syrienne trouvée dans tel ou tel *kontakion* puisse être utilisé comme critère de datation. Ensuite, la disjonction des traditions syriaque et grecque en Syrie ne peut être maintenue. Les travaux de Petersen et de Brock ont d’ailleurs montré que l’exclusion de la tradition syriaque est très discutable. Dans l’antiquité tardive, la Syrie occidentale était une région bilingue. Bien que la connaissance de la langue grecque ait été concentrée dans les villes et dans les grands monastères, et qu’elle ait été plus répandue dans les élites sociales et culturelles que parmi les petites gens, il y avait partout des points de contact, rattachant et intégrant les deux traditions. C’est précisément cette complexité culturelle et lin-

⁴⁹ Ib. 244.

⁵⁰ Voir aussi SC 99 (n. 3) 250.

guistique qui constitue le caractère distinctif de la Syrie à cette époque. Dès les premières origines du christianisme syrien, on observe le phénomène de la tradition bilingue de certains textes. En pareils cas, il est souvent très difficile, et même peu important, de distinguer nettement entre ce qui est grec et ce qui est syriaque.

Prenons l'exemple d'Éphrem le Syrien. Comme écrivain, celui-ci appartenait exclusivement à la littérature syriaque et était l'héritier direct des traditions littéraires araméennes, qui s'étaient développées au Proche-Orient au cours de plusieurs siècles. Mais en même temps, son œuvre ne peut être dissociée du courant d'idées et de traditions qui croissait dans la région hellénophone d'Antioche et dans l'empire romain, courant dont Éphrem subissait l'influence et auquel lui-même contribuait délibérément.⁵¹ De même, l'influence de l'œuvre d'Éphrem ne se limitait nullement au monde syriaque. Par le truchement de traductions et de remaniements, le rayonnement de cette œuvre a atteint toutes les Églises du christianisme ancien. Il est incorrect de séparer Romanos de la tradition éphrémiennne, même si dans des cas ponctuels il reste impossible de préciser dans quelle mesure Romanos fut marqué de son empreinte, ou par quelles voies il a pu s'en servir.⁵² Le diacre de Beyrouth et de Constantinople et le diacre de Nisibe et d'Édesse sont liés l'un à l'autre par une tradition continue—bien que complexe—dont chacun des deux est un représentant unique. La synthèse culturelle, telle qu'elle s'est opérée en Syrie, a inspiré les deux poètes qui, dans leur art créatif, ont exploité celle-ci d'une façon personnelle.

Le *Commentaire* déjà mentionné d'Eusèbe d'Émèse sur la Genèse constitue une autre preuve de la complexité linguistique de la Syrie à cette époque. Syrien d'origine, natif de la ville d'Édesse et contemporain d'Éphrem, Eusèbe écrit en grec, mais pour expliquer le texte biblique il se réfère souvent à la Bible syriaque et à la tradition exégétique syriaque. Ce *Commentaire*, qui a laissé des traces aussi bien dans la tradition grecque que dans la

⁵¹ La place d'Éphrem dans l'Église de l'Empire a été étudiée d'une façon très intéressante dans un article de S.H. Griffith, "Ephraem, the Deacon of Edessa, and the Church of the Empire", in *Diakonia. Studies in Honor of R.T. Meyer*, ed. T. Halton—J.P. Williman (Washington 1986) 22-52 (avec mes remerciements au professeur H.J.W. Drijvers, de Groningen, qui m'a signalé l'existence de cet article et m'en a procuré une copie).

⁵² Pour certains des passages étudiés par Petersen il n'est pas nécessaire, peut-être, de supposer une dépendance directe de Romanos par rapport à Éphrem. Cf. les remarques formulées par R. Murray, dans son compte rendu de l'ouvrage de Petersen, *The Journal of Theological Studies* NS 40 (1989) 258-260.

littérature syriaque, est conservé dans une version arménienne, datant probablement de la première moitié du cinquième siècle.⁵³ Ceci prouve, de nouveau, que les frontières linguistiques n'avaient pas un rôle décisif quand il s'agissait de la transmission de textes et d'idées. La correspondance de certaines interprétations de ce *Commentaire* avec celles de Romanos, n'indique pas nécessairement que Romanos a consulté le *Commentaire* d'Eusèbe (ce qui ne peut toutefois être exclu), mais peut s'expliquer par le fait que les deux auteurs avaient accès à la même tradition exégétique répandue en Syrie.

Ce qui vient d'être dit n'est pas sans conséquence, peut-être, pour l'étude de la langue de Romanos. Malgré la présence d'éléments rhétoriques et malgré le caractère artistique des *kontakia*, le vocabulaire de Romanos a été qualifié de simple et accessible à un grand public.⁵⁴ Quant aux sémitismes, sur lesquels certains auteurs avaient attiré l'attention, Grosdidier de Matons les voit limités à des expressions bibliques de la Septante, qui se retrouvent dans la langue des Pères.⁵⁵ Cette explication n'est pas satisfaisante. Dans son compte rendu de l'ouvrage de Grosdidier de Matons, A. de Halleux a dressé une liste de points, relatifs à la syntaxe et à la lexicographie, qui pourraient s'expliquer par l'influence du syriaque.⁵⁶ Cette possibilité mérite certainement d'être étudiée davantage. Toutefois, plutôt que d'insister sur le bilinguisme personnel de l'auteur, on devrait peut-être prendre en compte plus largement la situation linguistique de la Syrie et d'Émèse et les particularités de la *koinè* de cette région. Que la ville d'Émèse était autour de l'an 500 une ville bilingue, ne peut être mis en doute.⁵⁷ L'interprétation, proposée par Grosdidier de Matons, des données de la *Vie de Syméon Salos*, qui d'après lui indiqueraient que la langue syriaque n'était pas très répandue à Émèse,⁵⁸ ne peut emporter la conviction. De ladite *Vie de Syméon*

⁵³ Pour la tradition du *Commentaire* de la Genèse, voir F. Petit, "Les fragments grecs d'Eusèbe d'Émèse et de Théodore de Mopsueste. L'apport de Procope de Gaza", *Le Muséon* 104 (1991) 350-352. Voir aussi L. Van Rompay, "L'informateur syrien de Basile de Césarée. A propos de Genèse 1,2", *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 58 (1992) 245-251.

⁵⁴ Grosdidier de Matons 1977 (n. 3) 303.

⁵⁵ *Ib.* 181 et 286.

⁵⁶ A. de Halleux, "Hellénisme et syrianité de Romanos le Mélode. A propos d'un ouvrage récent", *RHE* 73 (1978) 640-641.

⁵⁷ L'argument donné par Petersen 1985 (n. 2) 3, note 12, n'est pas des plus forts. Pour quelques remarques sur la ville d'Émèse aux premiers siècles de l'ère chrétienne, cf. L. Van Rompay, "Palmyra, Emesa en Edessa: Semitische steden in het gehelleniseerde Nabije Oosten", *Phoenix* 36 (1990) 73-84.

⁵⁸ Grosdidier de Matons 1977 (n. 3) 181.

Salos, il existe une ancienne version syriaque, qui à certains endroits s'éloigne considérablement de l'original grec et laisse voir une couleur locale.⁵⁹

Disons enfin un mot de la théologie de Romanos. Après avoir suivi, dans le deuxième volume de son édition, l'opinion de P. Maas, qui soutenait le chalcédonisme strict de Romanos et son opposition au monophysisme,⁶⁰ Grosdidier de Matons fut obligé de réviser cette opinion à la suite d'un compte rendu d'A. de Halleux.⁶¹ Celui-ci avait remarqué qu'on ne trouve pas, dans les *kontakia*, la moindre allusion à la formule diphysite. De fait, Romanos n'est pas très éloigné des idées qui étaient communes aux monophysites et aux néochalcédoniens, et la mentalité christologique qu'il représente pourrait être appelée 'le monophysisme populaire'.⁶² De ce point de vue non plus, la coupure entre le Romanos constantinopolitain et son pays natal n'existe pas. Il n'y a d'ailleurs pas de raisons de supposer que Romanos, par son départ pour Constantinople, s'est détaché de la région syrienne. À cette époque, la présence dans la capitale de leaders ecclésiastiques et de moines syriens—aussi bien des acémètes chalcédoniens que des monophysites de l'entourage de Sévère⁶³—favori-

⁵⁹ Pour les manuscrits de cette version syriaque, inédite et insuffisamment étudiée, cf. A. Baumstark, *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur* (Bonn 1922) 264, note 1.

⁶⁰ SC 110 (n. 3) 43 et 164.

⁶¹ Paru dans *RHE* 62 (1967) 459-462, cf. Grosdidier de Matons 1977 (n. 3) 268, note 121. Pour quelques remarques sur la christologie de Romanos, voir aussi A. Grillmeier—Th. Hainthaler, *Jesus der Christus im Glauben der Kirche* 2/2, *Die Kirche von Konstantinopel im 6. Jahrhundert* (Freiburg im Breisgau etc. 1989) 534-544, surtout 542-543.

⁶² *Ib.* 461. Sur le plan théologique, la comparaison s'impose avec Jacques de Saroug, poète syrien et contemporain plus âgé de Romanos. Jacques de Saroug, pas plus que Romanos, ne s'est fixé sur des formules dogmatiques. Qu'ils se soient abstenus tous les deux—l'un du côté monophysite, l'autre du côté chalcédonien—de discussions dogmatiques, pourrait être dû à des motifs personnels. Mais en même temps, on pourrait y voir l'attitude délibérée d'un groupe de chrétiens qui voulaient éviter la polémique, un groupe à propos duquel Jansma a écrit: "Embrassants des convictions différentes, certains tenant pour la doctrine dyophysite, d'autres sympathisant avec le monophysisme, ils s'accordent en une attitude mitigée dans les affaires dogmatiques et dans leur désir de faire tout le possible pour maintenir la paix dans l'Eglise", cf. T. Jansma, "Encore le Credo de Jacques de Saroug. Nouvelles recherches sur l'argument historique concernant son orthodoxie", *L'Orient Syrien* 10 (1965) 213. Cette position de Romanos cadrerait bien, d'ailleurs, avec la politique religieuse de Justinien, cf. de Halleux 1967 (n. 61) 462.

⁶³ En 508, Sévère, le futur patriarche d'Antioche (512-518) arriva à Constantinople, accompagné d'un grand nombre de moines. Aussi sous les règnes de Justin et de Justinien, il y avait toujours des groupes de Syriens dans la capitale, voir p.ex. S.A. Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis. John of Ephesus and 'The Lives of Eastern Saints'* (Berkeley - Los Angeles - London 1990) 80-93.

sait une communication directe et intensive entre Constantinople et la Syrie.

C'est dans ce contexte qu'il faut situer Romanos: dans une période caractérisée par une grande complexité culturelle, où la Syrie avait un rôle important dans la vie de l'Église et de l'Empire. Aussi Romanos n'est-il pas un Syrien égaré, absorbé par la culture grecque, mais tout simplement ... un poète syrien à Constantinople.

Post-scriptum. Pour quelques remarques sur le contexte historique et culturel de Romanos, voir maintenant aussi A. Cameron, "Disputations, Polemical Literature and the Formation of Opinion in the Early Byzantine Period", dans *Dispute Poems and Dialogues in the Ancient and Mediaeval Near East* (Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 42; Louvain 1991) surtout 92-94.

ANTI-CHRISTIAN POLEMICS IN HEBREW LITURGICAL POETRY (*PIYYUT*) OF THE SIXTH AND SEVENTH CENTURIES

by

W. Jac. VAN BEKKUM

1. SYNAGOGUE AND WORSHIP

Hebrew liturgical poetry has its setting in the synagogue, the most important institute of Diaspora Judaism for the religious and social life of the Jews. After the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E., the synagogue appears as a fully developed communal centre with a variety of activities like prayer services and the reading and studying of the Torah and Prophets (*Haftarah*) for which specific congregations were held on the Sabbath and on feast-days.¹ Synagogal liturgy gradually adopted fixed patterns in the structure of prayer complexes. The basic element in prayer was the benediction, the *berakhah*, with its fixed introductory formula *barukh Attah Adonay* ("Blessed art Thou, o God"). The liturgical benedictions are in their turn basic conclusions in two prayer compositions of great importance, namely, the '*Amidah* and the recitation of the *Shema*'. The '*Amidah* or *Shemoneh 'Esreh* became crystallized in the Tannaitic period into a statutory public prayer in its own right by the fixation of number and order of the benedictions, but it did not have any authoritative text. Nuances and variations in its diction were allowed, and it is even ordained by the Sages that "one has to insert something new every day"² as an exhortation to improvise new formulations, even further ensured by a sustained oral transmission as it was explicitly stated: "they who write down benedictions are as though they burn the

¹ *HJP* II (1979) 425-7; S. Safrai, "The Synagogue", in *The Jewish People in the First Century* (CRINT I 2; Assen 1976) 908-44.

² Babylonian Talmud, *Berakhot* 29b.

Torah".³ Prayer was apparently considered as a dynamic element in worship, and the Sages were eager to keep flexibility in prayers as much as possible.

In addition to the '*Amidah*' there was another basic liturgical segment, namely the recitation of the '*Shema*', consisting of three biblical parts, Deut. 6,4-9, Deut. 11,13-21 and Num. 15,37-41, and three benedictions: two precede the '*Shema*', and one concludes it. Both '*Amidah*' and '*Shema*' are the nucleus of Jewish prayer and always remained customary in the liturgy of the synagogue.⁴ Their standardisation was already in an advanced stage at the end of the Amoraic period (500 C.E.). Although the synagogue was in fact a democratic institution, asking for everybody's participation in worship, the task of reading and explaining the Torah and of reciting the prayers was entrusted to specific persons, the *darshan*, the *meturgeman*, and especially the *hazzan*, the cantor. Ultimately it was the *hazzan* who became the leading figure in the congregation, attaining a position of general authority in the liturgical tradition of the synagogue. The recitation of prayers became for him more and more an automatism and he could not avoid the use of stereotyped expressions and the repetition of standard phrases. In the end there was no escape from stricter wording and fixed patterns. There may have been slight differences between one community and another, but the internal situation in Palestinian Judaism in the days of the completion of the Talmud was such that Jewish liturgy was generally no longer sufficiently stimulating. Additions were needed for the preservation of spontaneity and creativity in the services. This evoked new tension between, on the one hand, the wish to standardise prayer texts for the sake of the universality of Jewish tradition and, on the other hand, the desire for expressiveness and improvisation in prayer.

³ Babylonian Talmud, *Shabbat* 115b; also in *Menahot* 43b: "R. Meir used to say: a man is bound to say one hundred blessings daily, as it is written: and now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you? (Deut. 10,12)."

⁴ On the polemical status of the '*Shema*'-prayer: T. Lehnardt, "Der Gott der Welt ist unser König. Zur Vorstellung von der Königsherrschaft Gottes im *Shema* und seinen Benediktionen", in *Königsherrschaft Gottes und himmlischer Kult im Judentum, Urchristentum und in der hellenistischen Welt* ed. M. Hengel—A.M. Schwemer (Tübingen 1991) 285-6.

2. ORIGINS OF THE *PIYYUT*

The Jewish communities of the late Roman-Byzantine period were still in the middle of this dilemma. The danger of complete fixation was imminent and the *hazzanim* who were responsible for this development tried at the same time to find another possibility for renewing the prayer texts. They began to look for more refined and more poetic expressions and additions. At this point the interrelations of liturgy and poetry of the synagogue became clear. The way was paved for the appearance of the *paytan* (the Hebrew form of the Greek word ποιητής), the liturgical poet who composed his poems or complex of poems that are inserted in the liturgy or that accompany other religious ceremonies. His poetic *œuvre* is referred to by the name *Piyyut* which became highly respected in the synagogues of Palestine. The *Piyyut*-culture reached its peak in the sixth and seventh centuries and it is quite clear that the Graeco-Byzantine environment played a decisive part in this. It is important to know that there was extensive activity in Byzantine liturgical poetry as well, actually dominated by one man, called Romanos. As the most prominent among the Byzantine μελωδοί, hymn-writers, he gave Christian-Byzantine liturgy its shape, and his name has always been associated with the rise of a genre of hymns, the κοντάκιον.⁵ This composition was sung during the morning service immediately after the reading from the Scripture and that is why it was closely related to the themes of a given Sunday or feast-day.⁶ During the same period the *paytanim* developed a *piyyut*-composition for the additional prayer service (*Musaph*) of the Sabbath or feast-day right after the reading of Torah and Haftarah as a poetic elaboration of the 'Amidah. The 'Amidah consisted of eighteen benedictions, but this number was reduced to seven on the Sabbath and on feastdays. Of these seven the third one stands out; this is the *Qedushat ha-Shem*, the hallowing of God's name. The core of this benediction is the *Qedushah* or the Trishagion in Isa. 6,3 ("Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory"), together with Ezek. 3,13 ("Blessed be the glory of the Lord from His place"). The presence of the *Qedushah* gave way to a tremendous poetic activity and that is how the genre of the so-called *qedushta* came into being. The

⁵ J. Grosdidier de Matons, *Romanos le Mélode et les origines de la poésie religieuse à Byzance* (Paris 1977).

⁶ J. Schirmann, "Hebrew Liturgical Poetry and Christian Hymnology", *Jewish Quarterly Review* 44 (1953-4) 123-61; J. Yahalom, "Piyyut as Poetry", in *The Synagogue in Late Antiquity* ed. L.I. Levine (Philadelphia 1986) 123-4.

Palestinian school of *payṭanim* concentrated mainly upon this type of *piyyut*, which usually consists of seven to nine segments, all being poetic introductions to the *Qedushah* and linked with the Torah and Haftarah. This implies that *qedushta'ot* were not composed for feast-days only, but also for every Sabbath within the Torah reading cycle of 3½ years. The *payṭanim* considered it their duty to appear in the synagogue every Sabbath again with new *piyyuṭim*.

According to some views *Piyyut* did not exclusively rise as a result of an internal development and of the flourishing Byzantine culture which surrounded the Palestinian-Jewish communities. Several sources refer to the religious oppression on the part of Byzantine authority as a reason for the ascent and spread of the *Piyyut*. Pirkoy ben Ba'aboy (late eighth century) tells us on behalf of his teacher R. Yehudah Gaon concerning the Byzantine rulers

that they suppressed the Jews so that they could not recite *Shema'* and *Tefillah*, but they allowed them to assemble on Sabbath-morning in order to recite and to sing. They used to recite in the morning-service the daily reading selection and *Qedushah* and *Shema'* secretly. They had to do these things by force, but since the Holy One, blessed be He, destroyed the kingdom of Edom (i.e., Byzantium) and annulled their decisions, the *Ishmaelites* (i.e., the Arabs) came and they permitted the Jews to study the Torah and to recite *Shema'*.⁷

This information seems to be confirmed by the statement of R. Yehudah bar Barzilay (twelfth century) who in his *Sefer ha-'Ittim* ("Book of Times") says that the study of the Torah was forbidden as a result of religious tyranny and therefore the Sages decreed that the prescripts (*halakhot*) should be included in the prayers by means of hymns, rhymed poetry and *piyyuṭim*.⁸

Both accounts are possibly connected with the anti-Jewish legislation of the Byzantine emperor Justinian I (527-565). In the *Novellae* of the *Codex Justinianus* the legal basis of Byzantine Jewry as *religio licita* was virtually removed. The consistent repression of the Jews even led to interference with their internal affairs as can be illustrated by Novella 146 *De Hebraeis* of 553, ordering that the reading of the Greek and Latin versions of the Scripture (Septuagint and Aquila) be allowed in synagogal liturgy.⁹ Initially this

⁷ Text appears in L. Ginzberg, *Schechter Studies* II (New York 1928) 504-73; A. Mirski, *Ha'Piyut. The Development of Post Biblical Poetry in Eretz Israel and the Diaspora* (Jerusalem 1990) 50-6.

⁸ R. Yehudah bar Barzilay, *Sefer ha-'Ittim* ed. J. Schorr (Cracow 1903) 252.

⁹ R.-M. Seyberlich, "Die Judenpolitik Kaiser Justinians I", in *Byzantinistische Beiträge* ed. J. Irmischer (Berlin 1964) 73-80; A. Sharf, *Byzantine Jewry from*

Novella was issued because of a dispute in the synagogue of Constantinople. Traditional Jews wished to keep the original Hebrew reading of the Torah, whereas others favoured the reading of the Greek translation. The emperor immediately issued a law far beyond its first intention and to be applied in all Jewish communities within his jurisdiction. He expresses his preference for the Septuagint and calls its translators "preachers of the future appearance of our great god and saviour Jesus Christ". The Jewish audience of the synagogue should no longer stick to the literal sense of the text, but learn to see its true, divine meaning, so that they would know better and stop being in error. With reference to this Justinian seized the opportunity to warn the Jews against Jewish exegesis of the Scripture and against the literature of the Rabbis. The use of the so-called *δευτέρωσις* (i.e., *secunda lex*, the Oral Law or *Mishnah* and *Talmud*) has to be banned, a theme that already occurred in Patristic literature, especially in the writings of Jerome.¹⁰ Although this Novella may never have come into force, it certainly reflects the atmosphere of sixth-century Byzantium. During the reign of Justinian forced baptism was introduced and synagogues were destroyed or turned into churches. It is difficult to say, however, to what extent the acts and laws of the emperor and his successors were an external factor in the promotion of *Piyyut*.

3. THE EXEGETICAL PERSPECTIVE: FROM 'ALENU-PRAYER TO YANNAI

From a political and religious viewpoint official contacts between Jews and Byzantines were hostile.¹¹ The sixth and seventh centuries were characterised by a stream of Christian *Adversus Judaeos*-literature. Anti-Jewish polemics was a tradition in itself, conditioned by a pattern of normative presuppositions and argumentations which found their expression in various literary genres like disputes, homilies, epistles and poetry.¹² In their turn, the *pay-*

Justinian to the Fourth Crusade (London 1971) 19-41; M. Avi-Yonah, *The Jews of Palestine. A Political History from the Bar Kokhba War to the Arab Conquest* (Oxford 1976) 249-50.

¹⁰ S. Krauss, "The Jews in the Works of the Church Fathers", *Jewish Quarterly Review* Old Series 5 (1892) 122-57; 6 (1893) 82-99.225-61.

¹¹ J.F. Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century* (Cambridge 1991) 345-8.

¹² H. Schreckenberg, *Die christlichen Adversus-Judaeos-Texte und ihr literarisches und historisches Umfeld (1.-11. Jh.)* (Frankfurt a.M. 1990) 379-474; V. Déroche, "La Polémique anti-judaïque au VI^e et au VII^e Siècle. Un Memento Inédit, Les *Képhalaia*", *Travaux et Mémoires* 11 (1991) 275-97. Compare to the *Doctrina Jacobi*

ṭanim are not directly involved in religious polemics and their references to the political and social situation of Byzantine Jewry are scanty. The *piyyuṭim* are mainly designed to offer a poetic alternative for the routine of prayer texts, employing a traditional terminology with a long history in Rabbinical exegesis. Most of this terminology originates in the Hellenistic period and is closely connected with the generally accepted interpretation of Daniel 7, according to which an apocalyptic vision of world history is revealed. Many Rabbis adhered to the idea that the four beasts symbolize four successive empires: Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome. Ultimately the Roman empire will be overthrown and a messianic king will establish the hegemony of Israel.¹³ The latter eschatological conception is often exemplified by the account of Gen. 25,23: "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples, born of you, shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the elder shall serve the younger." The twin brothers Esau and Jacob represent the two peoples of Rome and Israel. The typology of Rome in the biblical image of Esau or Edom as an obverse of Jacob-Israel, who is the archetype of the Jews, enabled the Rabbis to apply biblical exegesis to their current situation.¹⁴ The *payṭanim* used these names as conventional appellations in order to give their criticism of Byzantium a biblical basis in accordance with the view in traditional exegesis, the *Midrash*. Edom currently had the connotation of 'the wicked empire', Rome or Byzantium, and implicitly the Christian faith. The suggestive usage of the term in the *Piyyuṭ* does not make it easy to define its concrete purport or to delimit an 'anti-Christian polemic' of the *payṭanim*. Moreover, a much longer tradition of anti-paganism existed in Jewish thought which exerted its influence upon the later approach to the actual situation of the Jewish people. The connotative possibilities of biblical terminology in liturgical texts has led to much confusion, as can be demonstrated by the twelfth benediction against heretics and apostates (*minim*) in the *Amidah*. This benediction is directed against various enemies of Judaism, but Christian tradition took this passage as a clear reference to

Nuper Baptizati: Διδασκαλία Ἰακώβου νεοβαπτίστου – βαπτισθέντος ἐπὶ Ἡρακλείου τοῦ εὐσεβεστάτου βασιλέως ed. V. Déroche, *Travaux et Mémoires* 11 (1991) 70-1; also the *Chronicon Paschale* (PG 92, 69-123).

¹³ D. Flusser, "The Four Empires in the fourth Sibyl and the Book of Daniel", *Israel Oriental Studies* 2 (1972) 148-75.

¹⁴ N.R.M. de Lange, "Jewish Attitudes to the Roman Empire", in *Imperialism in the Ancient World* ed. P.D.A. Garnsey—C.R. Whittaker (Cambridge 1978) 255-373.

Christianity.¹⁵ The contrast between Jews and pagans is also illustrated in the opening of the *'Alenu*-prayer:

It is our duty to praise the Master of all,
to exalt the Creator of the universe,
who has not formed us like the nations of the world,
and has not placed us like the families of the earth,
who has not determined our destiny to be like theirs,
nor our lot like that of all their multitude,
because they bow down to vanity and emptiness,
and pray to a god who does not save,
but we kneel, bow down and give praise
to the supreme King, (the Holy One, blessed be He) ...¹⁶

There is reason to believe that this text was already in existence during the Second Temple period and therefore no anti-Christian interpretation is permissible. Nevertheless, in later periods the prayer became part of Jewish-Christian polemics, because the phrase "a god who does not save" (Isa. 45,20: *el lo yoshia'*), supposedly referring to Jesus, was considered blasphemous.¹⁷

The early *paytan* Yosse ben Yosse (fifth century) presents the traditional interpretation of the fourth empire, when he writes in one of his New Year compositions:

To the beast of the reed (Ps. 68,31)
He (God) has sold the land (Ezek. 30,12).
Whom have I in Heaven? (Ps. 73,25),
thus it (the beast) raised its voice.
To the God of my salvation (Ps. 25,5)
I (Israel) cried for help from the iron teeth (Dan. 7,7),
and from <beneath> the heavy foot (Hab. 2,6)
I let my voice cry.¹⁸

This enigmatic sequence of biblical citations has to be put in the context of Daniel 7 according to the explicit allusion to the iron teeth of the fourth beast, i.e., the fourth empire of Edom. The intention of the poetic words can be clarified by the exegesis of Dan. 7,8 ("a mouth speaking great things") in Leviticus Rab-bah 13,5: "It alludes to Edom in that it did not raise his voice to extol the Holy One, blessed be He, but to revile and to blaspheme, saying: Whom have I in heaven?" The original meaning of Ps. 73,25 refers self-evidently to Heaven as the dwelling-place

¹⁵ *HJP* II (1979) 462-3.

¹⁶ Text appears in J. Heinemann, *Prayer in the Talmud* (Jerusalem 1976) 270-5.

¹⁷ N. Wieder, "On Anti-Christian and Anti-Muslim *Gemaṭriah*", *Sinay* 76 (1975) 1-14 (Hebr.).

¹⁸ A. Mirski, *Yosse ben Yosse* (Jerusalem 1977, reprint 1991) 113 (Hebr.).

of God, but the biblical passage is quoted here in order to indicate the opposite: no God dwells in Heaven. Any allusion to the historical situation of the Jews in the days of Yosse ben Yosse can be neither denied nor affirmed on the basis of such a passage.

The Palestinian *paytan* Yannai is much more explicit in his application of 'Edom' as a referential appellative to the political reality of the sixth century. His weekly compositions are thematically linked to the Torah-portions of each Sabbath. In a *qedushta* for Gen. 32,4 ("And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother in the land of Se'ir, the country of *Edom*") the meeting between Jacob and Esau-Edom is actualized:

God, be not silent / when our mouth is silent / and punish Edom /
and Edom shall be dispossessed (Num. 24,18);
eternal quarrel / and impudence / you will remove, o God / and
you will fight and you will judge;
they will descend into Abaddon / and they will know justice (Job
19,29) / and you will point the javelin / at Tyre and Sidon;
may hunger be sent among them / that they will be nourishment
for the fire / and hear our shouting / as you have made known to
Obadiah in a vision (Obad. 1,1).¹⁹

This *piyyut* is followed by the verse from Obad. 1,1 ("Thus says the Lord God concerning *Edom*") which refers to the *haftarah* of Gen. 32,4. Throughout the whole *qedushta* Edom is attacked by means of similar figures of speech and biblical quotations, occasionally to be completed by ideas from the *Midrash* as in the seventh *piyyut* of the same composition: "Throw down from the height the ruler of Edom." This is how Yannai ranks Edom—Esau with the power of the Byzantines, whose emperor should be overthrown.²⁰

It is not surprising that religious aspects of the troublesome relationship between Edom and Israel appear in a composition of Yannai for Deut. 6,4 ("Hear, o Israel, the Lord our God is *one* Lord") which is the most appropriate Torah-portion for the *paytan* to voice the religious feelings of his community:

Your name will be the only one / among those who acknowledge
the unity of your name / and your name will be called / by those
who call your name;

¹⁹ Z.M. Rabinovitz, *The Liturgical Poems of Rabbi Yannai according to the Triennial Cycle of the Pentateuch and the Holidays* (Jerusalem I 1985, II 1987) I 193 (Hebr.).

²⁰ Cf. Heinemann 1976 (n.16) 198; *Genesis Rabbah* 77,2: "R. Hama b. R. Hanina said: It was the guardian Prince (*sar*) of Esau." It is likely that Yannai mentions this midrashic image as a possible reference to the Byzantine emperor. See also G.D. Cohen, "Esau as Symbol in Early Medieval Thought", *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies* ed. A. Altmann (Cambridge 1967) 45-8.

forsake the kingdom of those who say (there are) two: one (and) one / and restore your kingdom to one people;
 the children of the innocent (Jacob, Gen. 25,27) when you will see that they are unanimous / you will be told who is like your people one nation (2 Sam. 7,23);
 it will be made known one day / with salvation of him who is acknowledged in his unity / and you will be made known that you are one / and your name is one (Zech. 14,9).²¹

A bitter complaint of the same *payṭan* about the deplorable situation of the Jewish people and the oppression of Judaism by Christian-Byzantine rule can be heard in a fragmentary *piyyut* for Num. 8,1 ("When you [Aaron] set up the lamps"). With the employment of repetition and symmetrical contrast the theme of the *menorah* (the seven-branched lamp) stands for the success of Christianity and the decline of Judaism:

The lamps of Edom became powerful and numerous,
 the lamps of Zion are destroyed and ravaged;
 the lamps of Edom burned increasingly stronger,
 the lamps of Zion are extinguished and quenched (Isa. 43,17);
 the lamps of Edom are everywhere present,
 the lamps of Zion are set back;
 the lamps of Edom, their light is bright,
 the lamps of Zion are blacker than soot (Lam. 4,8);
 the lamps of Edom are haughtily risen,
 the lamps of Zion went down and are crushed;
 the lamps of Edom are respected and adorned,
 the lamps of Zion are seized and turned over;
 the lamps of Edom shine because of a dead man,
 the lamps of Zion are passed out of mind like a dead man (Ps. 31,13) ...²²

The comparison between the lamps of Edom and Zion serves as a metaphor for the antipodal development of two religions. The *payṭan* deliberately used the name of Zion instead of Israel in direct reminiscence of the Temple period, the glorious days of the past, when the *menorah* burned as the outstanding symbol of freedom and independence. The mentioning of "a dead man" is interesting and is possibly an allusion to Jesus. The same phrase recurs once more in the *œuvre* of Yannai within his famous *qedush-ta* for the Day of Atonement, which consists of fifteen separate *piyyuṭim*. The tenth poem, also attributed to Yannai by most scholars, reflects through the eyes of the *payṭan* a number of concepts and practices of his time:

²¹ Z.M. Rabinovitz II 1987 (n. 19) 140-1.

²² *Ib.* 37-8.

Those who call a fool noble (Isa. 32,5),
 those who choose for detestable abominations,
 those who rejoice in the idol of a naked body,
 those who cling to a dead man before a living one,
 those who rant and rave and go astray in falsehood (Ps. 40,5), inveterate evildoers,
 those who are polluted by the sacrifices of the dead (Ps. 106,28),
 those who dissent from your commandments,
 those whose deeds are hidden in the dark (Isa. 29,15),
 those who <...> for the death of their god,
 those who kneel and bow down for the bent and kneeling one,
 those who are burning to do their wrong deeds,
 those who believe <... sufferance>,
 those who are grieved by their distress,
 those who are keen on those who see their mysteries,
 those who prepare an offering of swine's blood (Isa. 66,3),
 those who indulge in bastardy, in accordance with their origin,
 those who fast and chastise themselves in vain,
 those who acquire a collection of bones,
 those who get excited about them during their festivals,
 those who are utterly vain,
 those who hold the world with their lies.²³

At first glance this *piyyut* seems to represent a strong polemic against Christianity, but after close study of its characterisations many questions remain open. The *paytan* inserts several biblical phrases that are originally opposed to evil conduct within the religion of Israel. He gives the impression of warning his Jewish listeners or readers against behaving like those who call a fool noble or choose for detestable abominations, etc. It is therefore very doubtful whether one can apply the typology of this poem to the Christian contemporaries of the *paytan*.²⁴ On the other hand, anti-Christian interpretation can not be excluded: the Hebrew word *shoa'* in Isa. 32,5 can be taken as a reference to Jesus; the image of the "naked body" suggests the crucifix; the "dead man" is Jesus; the "sacrifices of the dead" are allusive to the consecrated host; the "hidden deeds in the dark" as well as fasting and chastisement could refer to monastic life; the "bent and kneeling one" is the crucified Jesus; "collected bones" are reminiscent of holy relics; "those who see their mysteries" is perhaps a historical reference to the idea that Jews and pagans should not be entrusted with the holy μυστήρια of Christianity. It is conceivable that the

²³ Ib. 221-2.

²⁴ J. Maier, "The *piyyut* 'Ha-'Omrin le-Khilay Shoa'" and anti-Christian Polemics", in *Studies in Aggadah, Targum and Jewish Liturgy in Memory of Joseph Heinemann* ed. J.J. Petuchowski—E. Fleischer (Jerusalem 1981) 100-110 (Hebr.).

boundaries between traditionality and actuality have consciously been left abstract by the *payṭan* who may have been afraid of censorship or really wished to combine his abhorrence of these concepts and practices with a warning for his own audience.

4. TOWARDS THE END OF THE BYZANTINE PERIOD: PALESTINIAN *PAYṬANIM*

In his entire *œuvre* of approximately one thousand compositions, Yannai, like most of his colleagues of the classical Palestinian school of *Piyyut*, does not appear to go beyond the conventional destination of their poetry inside the liturgy of the synagogue. With the disintegration of the Byzantine empire at the beginning of the seventh century, the wars with the Persians and the Arab conquest, Jewish eschatological expectations found an echo in the poetry of Palestinian *payṭanim*. The *kinot* (dirges) of El'azar birabbi Qilir for the Ninth of Ab, the day of mourning for the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple, are concluded with lengthy *silluqim*, bearing a general apocalyptic and messianic note.²⁵ Yohanan ha-Kohen, in one of his *silluqim*, is more specific in his reference to the coming to power by the Arabs. This *payṭan* characteristically views the newcomers as fitting into a divine plan to wipe out the Byzantine empire:

Dispossess the mountain of Seir and Edom (Num. 24,18),
speak to Assyria: he has to make haste and hurry
to plough down a godless nation (Isa. 10,6) by your mighty sceptre
(Ps. 110,2),
by the kingdom of the wild ass, to tread <him> down.²⁶

The last line explicitly refers to the Arabs, the descendants of Ishmael who himself is called in Gen. 16,12 'a wild ass of a man'. The reference to 'Assyria' as the biblical example of divine punishment is clearly taken from Isa. 10,5: "Ah, Assyria, the rod of my anger, the staff of my fury!" This appellation seems to reflect the hope for a swift campaign of Arabic forces in order to eliminate Byzantine rule in Palestine.²⁷ An anonymous *payṭan*, in similar vein, states in a *silluq*:

²⁵ J. Yahalom, "On the Validity of Literary Works as a Source for Historical Questions", *Qatedrah* 11 (1979) 125-33 (Hebr.); Sharf 1971 (n. 9) 53-4; G. Dagron - V. Déroche, "Juifs et Chrétiens dans l'Orient du VII^e siècle, Introduction historique, Entre histoire et apocalypse", *Travaux et Mémoires* 11 (1991) 26-7.41.

²⁶ Cf. N. Weisenstern, *The Piyyutim of Yohanan ha-Kohen birabbi Yehoshua* (Jerusalem 1984) 78.

²⁷ E. Fleischer, "Solving the Qiliri Riddle", *Tarbiz* 54 (1984-1985) 383-427, esp. 412 (Hebr.), supposes that 'Assyria' refers to the Persians in view of the threat of Persian invasion of Palestine in the years 610-614.

Assyria shall go forth against her (Byzantium),
 and pitch her palatial tent (Dan. 11,45) within her borders,
 and destroy all her tents (Jer. 10,20),
 all her idols shall be ashamed,
 all her images be confounded,
 he shall terrify her by panic,
 to leave her to owl and raven as inheritance (Isa. 34,11) to distort
 her doings,
 to blot out all her military power,
 he shall sink her into the heart of the seas (Ezek. 27,27),
 he shall lower her unto the deep,
 with the line of confusion he shall obscure her,
 with the plummet of chaos he shall <hit> her doubly (Isa. 34,11).²⁸

Expectations ran high, but did not immediately turn into reality. Byzantine revenge for the support of the Jews of Palestine to the Persians came in 629, when the emperor Heraclius (610-641) entered Jerusalem and took violent measures against the Jews. Only in 634, when the Arabs invaded Palestine, Jews enjoyed relief of oppressive decrees like forced baptism.²⁹

5. CONCLUSIONS

For most of our period we learn from the selection of quoted *piyyut*-texts that specific allusions to the political and religious status of the Jews in Byzantium are sparse. As official representatives of the Jewish community the *paytanim* are not primarily interested in direct religious polemics and no explicit support can be derived from their works. Of course, they do not lack sense for the political conditions and religious emotions of their audience and that is why they insert in a conventional way suggestive names and motifs which clarify their attitude towards Christianity and Byzantine rule. Their elitist poetry did not permit them to scorn and ridicule Christian belief as in contemporary Aramaic poetry,³⁰ but personally they may have been quite close to a popular view of a dominant religion which generally paid no respect to a Jewish minority.³¹

²⁸ Cf. J. Yahalom, "The Change of Power in Palestine as Conceived by Payanim and Darshanim", *Shalem* 6 (Jerusalem 1992) 6-7 (Hebr.).

²⁹ J. Even-Shemuel, *Midreshe Ge'ullah* (Midrashim on Redemption) (Jerusalem-Tel Aviv 1954) (Hebr.); *HJP* II (1979) 514-47.

³⁰ The hanged Haman is compared to the hanged god of the Christians; similar motifs occur in this poetry: M. Sokoloff-J. Yahalom, *Jewish-Aramaic Poems from the Byzantine Period* (forthcoming).

³¹ Cf. for a state-of-the-art in Byzantine Jewish anti-Christian polemic: N. de Lange, "A Fragment of Byzantine Anti-Christian Polemic", *Journal of Jewish Studies* 41 (1990) 92-100.

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